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THE REAL ALGERIA

A SOU!

THE REAL ALGERIA

BY

M. D. STOTT

WITH 36 ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS
BY THE AUTHOR

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“ Cette Terre d’Afrique est comme la Lointaine
Princesse . . . on la chérit dans la brume incertaine
Des rêves imprécis et des espoirs naïfs,
Evocateurs obscurs des Edens fugitifs.”

G. Demnia.

PREFACE

TRAVELLERS and novelists have been accustomed to portray the north coast of Africa, and more especially Algeria, when in search of the true local colour of that violence and passion believed to be hidden beneath the calm exterior of the non-European. The title, therefore, of this book, *The Real Algeria*, perhaps calls for some explanation.

If I was not long enough in the country for all my views to be coloured with what I have heard described as 'colonial bias,' yet I saw perhaps rather more of it than may be viewed—and interviewed—in the streets of Algiers, or in the 'train de luxe' from the coast to Biskra. My main object in this book has been to show the inhabitant of Algeria, whether native or European, as a human being; also to give some glimpse of the working of what is undoubtedly one of the greatest efforts of constructive colonisation ever undertaken by man.

It it easy to take the 'stage-Arab' as a typical specimen of the native of that curious land, Algeria; always provided, of course, that he is the only inhabitant presented to one's view. And it is no less easy to view the French administration of the colony through spectacles coloured by one's own political opinions. But neither proceeding is conducive to an impartial survey of the country.

As the great names of Algerian history come ringing down the line of fame, from Jugurtha in the dim mists of the past to Jonnart loudly acclaimed even in the dusty storm of modern party fighting, a dominant note of challenge seems to sound through them all.

It is the note of personal strength that strikes one. Great conquerors, great administrators, or great pacifists, as the case may be, they set their faces grimly as the fierce desire seizes them to make this savage, fighting section of North Africa into a strong united whole.

In so far as the personal element is allowed play in this turbulent land,—which to know once is to love,—a firm and energetic sense of justice soon makes itself felt. It is when an infinity of quarrelling interests are allowed a voice in the matter that the trouble begins. Unhappily, the peculiar conditions and temperament prevalent in Algeria, the subdivision of faction that multiplies 'party' to the n^{th} degree, provides a ground of peculiar richness to breed wrong for the Chief Executor.

There is another point. As the soldier precedes the colonist, the 'colon' finds the land more or less peaceful and cared for, provided with plenty of roads and so forth. He has therefore the more time to spend on politics. It is only in human nature that he should do so. Mention should also be made of the extensive system of grants of land to colonists which permit of much more or less open jobbery, among other things that egg him on to strife.

The above strike one as the main points that go to make up that marked difference which is noticeable between the effects of French colonisation and our own.

One is bound to note these things if one takes to the road in Algeria. My own trip traversed not only a fair stretch of the coast, the rich Tell, but also included a cut straight south from the sea to Biskra. My road lay at the beginning through the richest part of the coast-land, then through gradations of toil and poverty of the uplands and down again to the rich oases of the desert. A land always fascinating, often beautiful, and South still showing the fingermarks of Rome's relentless grasp.

I saw a good many things, I heard a good many things, I made some charming acquaintances, and I have tried to put down honestly what I observed.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

OLD ALGIERS

PAGE

Arrival—First impressions—Our guide—Rue Bab-Azoun—Moorish dress—Jewish quarter—Kasbah—Its memories—More guides—Native quarter—East and West—The ladies 1

CHAPTER II

MODERN ALGIERS

Benzarti—A Moorish house—Domestic habits—Giaour—Tanit—Djama-el-Djerid—A Negro festivity—Cemetery—Ritual—El-Kebir—Koranic MSS.—Fine façade—Minaret—Tachfin—Mimbar 16

CHAPTER III

ALGIERS GRAVE AND GAY

The hierarchy—Sidi Abd-er-Rahman—Another saint—Wrestling—A music-hall—Racial fusion—L'Esprit algerién—A labour of love—Modern architecture 29

CHAPTER IV

RULERS AND RULED

Jardin d'Essai—Prospectus élégant—Bacri—The Fan Episode—Reign of Régis—Israel—Christian brotherhood—Foreign element—A Great Idea—Kit—Camera 45

CHAPTER V

ROUND AND ABOUT ALGIERS

Restaurant Gruber—Chevaliers d'industrie—Suburbs—Man and Nature—Climate—A Djnoun—Guyotville—The hills—A panorama—The conquering vine—Native labourers—Flowers—Norias—El-Biar 60

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ROAD TO TIZI-OUZOU PAGE

Start—Oued-el-Harrach—White Fathers—Agricultural College — Bourricots — Market gardening — Success and failure — Rouiba—A puncture—Menerville—Oxen—Valley of Sebaou —Camp du Maréchal 76

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTURE OF FORT NATIONAL

Djurdjura—Upper Kabylia—Country-side—Wayside school—Fort National—Zouaves—The Colonel—A guide and mentor—Native soldiery—Men—Officers—A leopard's spots—Hospitality by proxy 92

CHAPTER VIII

THE HEIGHTS OF THE DJURDJURA

Market day—Country folk—Michelet—Return of Zouaves—Arms—My 'caporal'—Paladins all—In memory—To Azazga —Olive-trees—Fig culture—At the well—Women—Bagmen—Feuds—Yacouren 109

CHAPTER IX

A NARROW ESCAPE

A Crimean veteran—Panthers—Mokrani's rising—Forest ride—A smash—Off again—Ever upwards—The Soumane—Cork—Taourirt Ighl—Native servant—Cheerful tales—Lucky riding—Something like a gorge—El-Kseur . . 127

CHAPTER X

EASTWARDS FROM BOUGIE

Bougie—The Zephir and the colonist—Bougie's history—Its habits—Source des Agaïdes—Bay—A pleasant meeting—Ubiquitous Hornsey—Fine coast road to Ziama—Ziama Mansouriah—A coming resort—Italian methods—Creepy cave work—Itinerant photographer—A budding romance—In vino veritas 143

CHAPTER XI

A GOOD SAMARITAN

PAGE

Biskra bound—Courteous officialdom—Oued Agrioun—Maison forestière—Native education—A 'corker'—Violet—Savante d'ecurie—A true Shakespearian—Tribal cleavage—Kabyle religion — Divorce—Oranges—A ruse — Departure — The penitential load 161

CHAPTER XII

A LEAP IN THE DARK

Eagles—An official's duty—The pen of power—Unofficial bloodsuckers—Les Premiers Soldats—Kerrata—An envoy—A silver cloud with a black lining—Mud—More mud—A pump in time—Native kindness—At a price—To Aïn Roua—Up and up—Forward Algeria 177

CHAPTER XIII

THE PIPES OF PAN

The Béchara—A local patriot—Soft-hearted—On the road together—Arid land—Justice—Sétif—Walled and loopholed—A military play—Hardships of the Nomads—Winter in the Hauts Plateaux—Wonderful colour—Ampère—Caravans—The old days 192

CHAPTER XIV

ACROSS THE PLAINS

Bagman—Local market—Hebrew jewellers—Land banks—Silos—The marabout touch—Panoramic mud—Pretty Corneille—A colonial centre—Bernelle the Mean—Patriarchal rule—Bourricot—Arab workmen—' Nous autres '—On the road to Biskra—A swain—Silver scene—Col de Telmet—Batna 207

CHAPTER XV

ON THE TRACK OF THE LEGION

Soldier-town—Football—A sergeant of chasseurs—Dangerous criticism—L'Artiste—Et son œuvre—A lightning sculptor—Mice and men—Retribution—Lambèse—Roman occupation—' Pia Vindex '—' Bats. d'Af.'—Foreign Legion—Compagnies de discipline—A German invasion . . . 224

CHAPTER XVI

TIMGAD AND THE LEGION

PAGE

Markouna—Vicissitudes of Thamagudi—Déblayage—Linking up—Trajan and Timgad—Baths—Library—Forum—Drainage—Vespasian's arch—Theatres—Capitolian emulation—Economical excavation—Trajan's arch 242

CHAPTER XVII

EL-KANTARA

Trunk road to Biskra—Macmahon—Desolation—Peaks of the Tamarins—Band of pilgrims—Gorge of El-Kantara—Fine Roman bridge—A truly Arab house—An excellent guide—Land tenure—Unofficial taxes—Worthless land—El-Outaia—A marriage party 257

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOME OF BLOOD AND FIRE

Col de Sfa—Biskra—My hotel—Our guests—Amateur detective—When the cat's away—Danse du ventre—Lapsus—Ismail—To the Desert—Mule-back—Mr. Robert Hichens—Sahara at last!—Whither away?—Ostrich-hunting—Touareg tales—Fabled wealth 274

CHAPTER XIX

OLD BISKRA

Palm-tree culture—A fair profit—Old Biskra—Local colour—Infamous Ismail—Virtue triumphant—Guide-dodging—Missionaries—Casino—Negro quarter—Danse nègre—A weird sight—Largesse!—Monkey-figures—To bed . . . 291

CHAPTER XX

THE HOLY CITY

An early start—Oued Abdi—Sidi Okba—My escort—Crowded, winding streets—Market—Mosque and mufti—Sidi Aïssa and the Devil—As one gentleman to another—The Ramayana—Colonel Flatters—Charity organisation—A pair of bold black eyes—Curios 300

EPILOGUE 312

INDEX 315

ILLUSTRATIONS

À Sou! . . . . *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

The Place du Gouvernement 4

Under the Shade of a Friendly Arch 12

Throwing Themselves into the Yoke 90

The Djurdjura Gate 100

Along Main Street 108

The Captain Following Behind on his White Charger . 108

He was so very much Alone 110

View from Taourirt Ighil 140

In and Out the River Wound 162

Cigarettes and Cups of Sticky Black Coffee . . . 180

Rolls of Manchester Cottons 180

In the Middle of the Road Looking after Me . . . 182

Nomads Encamped at the Foot of the Hodna Mountains . 204

Zig-zagging Along the Contour of the Hill-side . . 218

A Moving Rainbow 220

Burnished Silver in the Bright Sun 220

A Football Match at Batna 228

The Prætorium at Lambèse 234

Amongst the Foothills 234

Trajan's Arch 244

The Cardo Maximus 246

The Theatre at Timgad 250

The Capitol at Timgad 252

Cliffs of Sandstone-Grit Rise Sheer in the Air . . 260

FACING PAGE
My Saharan Escort 282
A Lonely Camel with its Rider 286
Some Old-World Garden 290
Going on a Visit to Friends 292
Through the Narrow Mud-walled Lanes . . . 294
An Old Grandfather in Flowing Burnous . . . 298
That Road to Sidi Okba 300
The Crowded, Squabbling, Market-Place . . . 302
The Great White Colonnade 306
You Pass Innumerable Shops 308
Drop the Pilot 312

THE REAL ALGERIA

CHAPTER I

OLD ALGIERS

IT was over lunch that I made acquaintance with the East.

My table companion, Thomson by name, enjoyed his meals, and that is a thing I like to see a man do abroad. I have always rejoiced in a most cosmopolitan stomach myself, and have found it a great aid and passport to the heart of the stranger. I confided in him accordingly, and was rewarded by wondrous stories of the Congo—of which I still hope many were true.

We had long discussions as to the hotel to be honoured with our presence. Neither of us knew anything about Algiers, and we had both had considerable experience of the usual hotel highly recommended to English and American visitors. Of such are the caravanserais of Mustapha-Supérieur ; palaces of art in which the Arabian Nights and Tottenham Court Road are blended together in a terrible emulsion of oil and water. And the visitors are like unto the mixture—a mass of segregated units.

You see them to particular advantage about tea-time, when the family gathers round the sacred pot in hushed silence. Papa glances through a three days' old *Telegraph* ("None of your damn French papers for me, sir!"); mamma takes her knitting and the girls do whatever respectable girls should do at such a time, discuss tennis and—perhaps—a novel by Mr. Robert Hichens.

Finally we had to toss for our hotel! The Hotel du Soleil won—and just in time, for we were passing the Peñon, that island outpost of the Cross against the Crescent, where, in Spain's halcyon days, stout old Martin de Vegas faced the followers of the Prophet, sword in hand and alone—the last of the garrison.

Slowly the boat turned completely round in the harbour and drew up to the pontoon. The Biskris came leaping and tumbling aboard, shouldered a number of packages only to compare with the tale of plates juggled with by an Italian waiter on a busy day, and hurried us ashore, where we were most kindly received by the customs officers. They passed us on to the fanatical mob of 'sou-hunters' that habitually form square round the conveyances on the quay.

A word in passing as to the Biskri. He is reported to come from Biskra for the season, and there is really nothing to controvert this view, except his capacity for work. Biskra, as we shall see later on, is inhabited chiefly by shoe-blacks, and there is evidence to show that the impudent little gutter-snipe develops on occasion into the stalwart, muscular, jersey-clad 'porte-faix.' So there is probably some truth in the rumour that the Biskri fleeces the Frank at both ends of his trip.

Eventually we won our way through the serried ranks of itching palms and reached the hotel in time for lunch, where the proprietor most kindly welcomed us to his bosom, killed for us the fatted calf, and altogether treated us as only prodigals could be treated—at twelve francs a day.

One's first real impression of Algiers is that of a Parisian faubourg in a dirty bath-towel. I explained this to my friend. He said that the best way of settling the matter was for us to go and have a look at the native town right away and so get the worst over at once. This advice seemed so sound that I instantly spoke to the porter about a guide, finding on reference to my guide-book that such an addition was essential. So Benzarti was summoned.

Contrary to my expectation, Benzarti was less a figment of Oriental splendour than a somewhat dirty and distinctly materialistic fact. It is true that he wore trousers of white linen and baggy shape, but they were dingy, and were tightened in over a grimy bare calf that led down to a very dusty lemon-yellow Arab slipper decorated with the trefoil and other European designs; it is also true that his blue shirt was covered by a cerise vest that had once been heavily embroidered, and that his chechia (local variety of fez) was probably not more than a generation old; but for all that there was lacking an indefinable something that gives these bandits of the café their sole right to the spoil. This feeling of distaste was accentuated when I noticed that he squinted vilely.

"Mossieu desires to see the sights of Algiers. Tu as bien choisi. Il n'y pas de meilleur guide que moi.

"Monsieur desires to see the Mosque Djama-Kebir?"

"No!" said I with some energy. "We want to see the town."

"I will arrange a dance immediately," he replied without the flicker of an eyelid. "Monsieur is English! Excellent! The English always pay best and the dances are more wicked!" The porter still dozed in his chair. With some heat I turned on Benzarti.

"No, thanks, not to-day. I'll tell you when we want you." And so giving him a few coppers I got rid of him—for the time being.

"Well now," said my companion, "suppose we go on our own and try our luck?"

To this suggestion I agreed, and we, therefore, metaphorically, girded up our loins and stepped out on the Place du Gouvernement.

There is nothing like getting hold of one's whereabouts to start with, so we strolled along under the cool arches of the Rue Bab-Azoun, the Bond Street of modern Icosium.

THE PLACE DU GOUVERNEMENT

In common with every other street in the world it has its aristocratic and its plebeian side. On the left are the dainty little places beloved of the ladies, where one can buy ribbons, chocolates, jewellery, and a good deal of trouble if afflicted with the 'glad eye.'

The olive skin is all prevalent, of course; but it is curious to contrast the 'saut latin' of the walk with the native lounge on the part of the men. They are, however, both at one again in that air which can only be described as sultanish, and is one of the strangest as it is certainly one of the most powerful results produced by prolonged residence on that strange coast where passion and work are equally spasmodic and uncontrollable, and where loafing is the order of the day. It seems to suit the Italian and the Spaniard, but affects the Frenchman with a sort of nervous excitement that plays the very devil with him after a bit. Can he acclimatise? Or is he too Northern?

Colour bright and warm enlivens everything, and here there is nothing so tremendous as the contrast between the gay clothes of the Italian and Spanish women, and in lesser degree the French, and the spotless white of the Moorish ladies. Perhaps the easiest way of giving a comprehensive idea of the appearance of the last is to compare them to an equilateral triangle of white linen with the apex at the crown of the head. Let us start, then, from the apex and work downwards.

Over all comes a large cotton or gauze shawl, the haik. Next we have a foulard which envelops the head, whilst the face is covered by a handkerchief. Over the jacket of silk (frimsah) comes the short tunic or rh'lilah, and under it, I am glad to say, a chemise. Last, but not least, we arrive at the huge wide trousers; stay, I had almost forgotten the dainty stockings and, for walking out, the Parisian slippers with Louis XIV heels. Often as many bangles jingle on her ankles as on her arms.

This monotony of dress is by no means the case as regards the men. Here one meets, within a hundred yards, the Moor with his baggy white trousers tightened at the knee, his embroidered waistcoat, coloured shirt and Bond Street socks supported by suspenders, ending as often as not in patent-leather shoes; his more up-to-date brother, who has the complete suit, baggy breeches and all, cut out of a grey cheviot (!); the Kabyle striding along in tatters with goodness knows how many rouleaux of bank-notes hidden about his person. Despite the fact that his burnous is filthily dirty and ragged, that his 'gandoura' or shirt is nothing more nor less than a scandal, and that he would never dream of going to the expense of shoes, he may well be the richest man in the street. The Bedouin's spotless white burnous, his haik bound round his turban with many rounds of camel hair and falling gracefully over his shoulders are much in evidence; and the town Arab, who delights in spotless raiment of fine white linen in flowing graceful folds and a burnous of delicate tint.

As the collar-galled mules drag along the lumbering two-wheeled carts to the cracking of the whips of the swarthy carters, and the clanging trams edge their way down the narrow strip of blinding sunlight that runs like a river down the centre of Bab-Azoun, the Moor and the Arab lounge along in the violet shade of the arcades with a cynical expression of resignation. Allah is indeed great, and his ways are inscrutable. Since Charles V besieged the town, and the Sieur Bélaguer de Savignac left his poniard sticking in the Gate Bab-Azoun with the proud cry, "We are coming back for it!" it has taken the Christian dogs three hundred years to redeem that boast, and bring the true believer under the heel of the Frank. How long will Allah permit this outrage? For Mahomet is indeed his prophet!

One of the things to remember about Algiers is that the different nationalities have their distinct quarters. Thomson, with his usual wisdom, suggested that as the only trustworthy information that we had at our disposal was that the native town lay on the side of the hill, the best thing to be done was to take a tram to the top and walk down. On due enquiry, we found that it was indeed possible to obtain a tram running to the top; to a place, in fact, called the Kasbah, where there was an excellent view to be obtained, and there were also many soldiers to interest the foreigner. On the other hand, added our informant, it was possible to walk up the hill and save our tramfares, whilst obtaining that gentle exercise so essential to health and good digestion. I looked at Thomson, Thomson looked at me, we both looked at the sun and—we silently made for the tram.

The feeling that we had done the right thing by ourselves produced a sense of comfort which was eminently satisfactory, and we took much interest in the Rue de la Lyre and its little shops. Of course the Chosen People, who from time immemorial have made Algiers their happy hunting ground, are to be found here in great force.

Jews have always played a large rôle in the French colonies, even as they have in ours—probably, indeed, much larger; and it may be worth while later on to glance at the 'Affaire Bacri' which gave Algeria to France. For as a Frenchman once said, if Algeria is such a flawless gem as its owners would have the rest of the world believe, the portico of the consular palace ought indeed to be adorned with the name Bacri in letters of gold.

But let us get on to the Kasbah. On, on up hill!

The ancient citadel is girded by a wall that once was obviously of tremendous strength; but now this rampart has been pulled down in various places, where it has not been battered to pieces by guns. Old gates have been closed up and new ones opened; many buildings inside have been turned into barracks. Quick-moving 'piou-pious' replace the 'effete' Turkish soldier, and altogether the place must have undergone considerable changes from the day when it was built by Aroudj, first of the Barbarousses, in 1516. What sights, indeed, it must have witnessed! What lakes of blood have soaked into its unhallowed ground from the massacre of Kourlourlis in 1629 to the days of the Chouach Touheurt, who decapitated one hundred and thirty-two Arabs in a day! Amongst the celebrities of the Kasbah let us not forget the executioner Ali-Siaf, of blessed memory, who was reputed to be so adroit with his sword that his victims were quite unaware when their fate had overtaken them. It is said that it was always necessary to place a snuff-box under the noses of his clients that they might sneeze and thereby lose the delicate poise of their heads so lightly touched by Ali.

I understand that the French have left intact, or restored, many of the most interesting buildings, moreover that there is much to be seen therein in the way of interesting Moorish architectural work and tracery; but remembering that we were out for pleasure, not sight-seeing, my friend and I turned joyfully aside and left them to another day—to the Greek Kalends, to put it bluntly. By preference we strolled through a stable yard and mounted the old grey ramparts.

We leant on the wall enjoying the quiet breeze as we let our eyes rove over the mosques and flat-roofed houses close at hand, on some of which we could distinguish children at play with the women, or ladies taking their siesta. In the distance to the right the town stretched far away to Cape Matifou, whence, in the old days, guns used to salute the arrival of the new Turkish governor. Whether they also fired an economical salute at the same time over the remains of his late lamented predecessor belongs, of course, to the secret history of the Courts of Europe.

How beautiful, how glistening, how white the city looks amongst its waving palms and greenery! Mustapha-Supérieur is certainly more dashing and 'posterish' in its night splendour than the lower town. But give me the latter for those pleasant jumbled thoughts that make half the delight of a ramble. A sharp word of command with the ring of a gun-butt broke in not unpleasantly on our musings. We were, indeed, having a rather pleasant, romantic time when—

"Ah, môssieu," said a silken voice in my ear, "c'est donc ce soir que nous allons voir la danse des Ouled Nails?"

We both jumped. At our elbow was Benzarti, smiling and squinting as ever.

"No!" I replied furiously. "I see the boat is just coming in; you'd better hurry down. You might lose a few sous!"

"But I have arranged all, à la maison là-bas. Les femmes sont ravissantes!"

Then I grew mad, perceiving that grace was not in him.

"Get out!" I yelled. "Veux tu t'en aller ou je te donne un bon coup de pied au derrière!" Whereat he departed hastily.

As may well be imagined the irruption of Benzarti had completely put an end to the sweetness of our reverie. Not even the Peñon, which is supposed to work upon the imagination of the most recalcitrant visitor, was able to accomplish its appointed task. In vain I remembered how the guide-book told me it was a Spanish fort built by the Comte de Novara in 1510, and taken by Kair-ed-din after one of the most heroic defences known to history. I was willing to admit that it must have been trying, a fortress stuck on a rock in the midst of sea so completely cut off from the town, yet so well within gunshot; I would have gone as far as granting you that an epic might have been written about the heroism of the hundred and fifty defenders of that little white bauble of the Spanish Crown, when for a fortnight they held it with practically no food or water, under the fire of every gun that the Dey, by hook or by crook, could bring to bear on them. All this was, as I said, meet food for a most mighty poem; but the interloper had done his work but too well. There was nothing left for us but to continue our peregrinations in a soured and more prosaic mind.

On leaving the citadel we were nearly run over by one of those trams that insist on whizzing through the Kasbah at unexpected moments. Perhaps this accounts for our not taking proper note of the historic building wherein the celebrated incident of the fan took place, so doubtless it would be as well to postpone any suitable remarks upon the subject until we shall later on have occasion to glance at the Algerian Jew and his ways. It may be as well, though, to remember that there is no one more insolent than a beggar on horseback, and that the Dey was a choleric old gentleman whose ideas on the higher finance unfortunately were quite modern in theory but a little rusty in the practice.

Following up a considered plan, we decided to go down hill and trust to luck; we dived into the labyrinth of streets that go to form the old town. To try and remember their names would be of course utterly hopeless, all one's attention being taken up with a serious attempt to retain that manner of progress so necessary to the dignity of civilised man, and so difficult when one is walking down the side of a house. So I would simply say that if ever again I catch such a respectable English divine as the Reverend Sidney Smith giving his name to a back alley in an unwashed town that is no better than it should be, I will write to the *Times*.

If anyone wants to realise the possible sensations of a rabbit, when it is in a hurry to get away from a ferret and finds every hole has been stopped, let him try

UNDER THE SHADE OF A FRIENDLY ARCH

and make a bee-line from the top of old Algiers to the bottom. When you are not sidling through narrow alleys between overhanging lime-washed houses that almost meet at the top storey, you are creeping under dark archways where the half-open treacherous doors make you shiver, and the ghostly figures that flit silently in, out and about by no means ease your feelings. Sometimes the street broadens out very slightly, and you see that all the houses are of a dirty white with overhanging porches of wood, these latter not infrequently tiled in a green that goes very effectively with the dark, heavy, nail-studded doors.

All doors are surmounted by a well-barred grille. Some of the jambs are handsomely carved in a conventional design. The few windows that face on to the street are high up and barred. As you watch, ever and anon you will note a quiet-moving porter or servant emerge from some discreetly opened door.

On occasion you come to long flights of steps leading down a street of inconceivable narrowness under long archways (the number of the arches in old Algiers is astounding), where baggy-trousered women in white pass silently by, all veiled of course, and often carrying babies on their arms. Some stare straight in front of them and some—do not.

The place is highly romantic and passably dirty, and you are just beginning to properly savour the East when a postman passes, or some other European official of the powers that be, and—heigh, prestissimo, pass!—the vision is gone, then you remember nothing but the heat and the smell. By the time you have lost your way five times in as many minutes you begin to get a bit annoyed.

It is satisfactory to note that the native ladies like shopping as much as their whiter sisters. Though quite naturally the more important and decorative part of the work is done in the European quarter, there is still enough left for them to do and to see in these tortuous ways. Their remarks over the purchase of, say, a string of onions, are generally incisive and to the point, and would put the majority of our academically-trained costers to the blush.

Whether you are under the escort of the tribe Benzarti or not, it is impossible to escape the ladies' quarter. I mention this as a curious fact that may in some way account for the vast number of English sovereigns that seem to be in use there for charms and bangles. Those most frequently to be observed in the quarter are elderly visitors of impeccable appearance. For the rest there is but little to remark upon the subject, except that the fair damsels have a good deal to learn from us Westerners in the painting of their faces, and that the gaudy stuffs that go to make up the greater part of their apparel bear an almost unmistakable Manchester stamp.

Everybody sits in the open, or, at any rate, in the shop-fronts—the floor being often raised from the street-level. There the shoemaker, the tailor, the brass-worker are to be seen working away and gossiping interminably with the half-dozen friends that either rest cross-legged on the benches round the shop or prefer the floor as being more homely. The everlasting cigarette is rolled and re-rolled and the interminable tiny cups of coffee go round. The advantage of this method is that the buyer does know what he is getting. It is especially desirable when applied to restaurants. People are inclined to consider the Arab as too lazy for this world and too wicked for the next. About the second proposition I cannot speak with authority, but as concerns the first there is no doubt at all.

Where the essentials of life are concerned the Easterner gets there every time and leaves us gasping.

Our friend the Moor insists on having his food cooked in the front part of the shop—the window as one might say, so that he can see what is going on and that he gets value for money. As for the eating, he retires to the background to masticate. This is one of the great points of difference between East and West, a point one might enlarge upon were it more profitable and less libellous.

CHAPTER II

MODERN ALGIERS

THIS is the story of my final battle with, and defeat by, Benzarti. The happening of it was as follows.

Thomson and I had canvassed around for some method of seeing the interior of a native house; or rather, to be quite correct, it was I who showed this haunting desire.

I sought information in every possible direction but always came back to the same starting-point and good advice. "Get somebody to take you there!" The hotel porter was equally communicative. It appeared that Benzarti was a great man about Moorish houses; in fact, as the saying is, he had forgotten far more about this subject than most men have ever learned.

I had a very natural disinclination to hold further converse with this person after our late discussion. But eventually seeing that there was no help for it, I bowed to the inevitable.

We set out on the strict understanding that I was to see a really good interior. The thing, he said, could be done; and indeed, through his extensive knowledge of the city he was sure of being able to put me in the way of the very thing I wanted.

Truly such omniscience ought to have put me on my guard; but unfortunately it did not. So that when we stopped outside a door studded with heavy nails I felt considerable satisfaction. I was so interested that for the moment I failed to heed the enigmatic smiles of sundry passers-by; it was only later that they returned vividly to my mind.

To me the entry of a strange house is always fraught with mystery. There is subdued romance lurking on the door-mat of every villa in Peckham—a bit drab perhaps, but still romance. How much more then in the 'White City'!

What I precisely did expect it would be difficult to say. In all probability the opening of the door by a grave and polite Arab in flowing white burnous, the hurrying scutter of the giggling women to their quarters; perhaps the offer of a delightful cup of coffee with the exchange of a few courteous phrases. So much for the dream!

The door was opened actually by a somewhat slatternly woman far removed from that age at which the veil may be righteously and properly discarded. It was then, alas! that I knew my fate and the smiles of the passers-by were easily explained. As, however, there was no retreating, I put a good face on the matter and, in answer to her gesture of invitation, stepped in.

Imagine yourself in a low, dark passage with a bench at the side, a nasty dark corner and some steps which lead on to a central court. The court has a couple of galleried storeys out of which the various dwelling-rooms open. Each chamber has its own door and little window looking out on to the passage; in the better houses frequently this window is glazed with pieces of coloured glass heavily leaded together in some pretty arabesque design. Slim pillars support the Moorish arches of the colonnade, which are, of course, limewashed but prettily relieved in places by porcelain tiles in the more aristocratic houses. A curious ornament, strongly reminiscent of the dog-tooth, is used to accentuate the slimness of the pillars. Every available inch of wall space is tiled in subdued pattern or else in plain checks of white and some other colour. In the centre of the flagged court plays a musical little fountain which supplies the household water. The level of the court floor is a step below that of the gallery passage; on this step sit the domestics of the household preparing couscous—a sort of porridge not unlike tapioca—and other dishes in large earthenware bowls. Oriental mats of various kinds are scattered about the passages, and on these more or less naked little urchins roll and play with sundry gurgles of joy. Narrow steep stairs lead to the upper storeys, which are also tiled. Here the arrangement of chambers, galleries, colonnade and mats is simply a repetition of the lower storey.

Where several families inhabit the same dwelling, which is the case in the poorer quarters of the town (slums are not a sign of progress and civilisation peculiar to London), all women veil themselves.

Each man attached to the establishment has his own particular knock wherewith to forewarn the womenkind, and so permit his comrades' female belongings to save their faces and hide their shame even if they show their legs. The effect is said to be strangely reminiscent of the West-End on a wet day.

In the particular house I mention, however, as male tenure was not permanent, there was no need of formality.

Benzarti and I were ushered into a room most comfortably littered with rugs and cushions—a bit on the grubby side, it is true, but quite sufficiently picturesque and luxurious in the dim light. There was a low charpoy in the centre, on which rested a rather fine brass tray. When my eyes became accustomed to the dim light, I perceived that the appearance of the whole room was completely spoilt by a cut-glass candelabra and a sideboard in the cheaper fashion of the Tottenham Court Road.

Apparently the Easterner has no spontaneous artistic sense as we understand it. His brain, trained in the subtleties of dreamland, has had no need to turn to the artificial devices of highly developed intelligence of the West. It is only with us that everything appeals with such painful clarity to minds so fed on materialism that even their moments of rest must be as carefully considered as those of their most strenuous endeavour.

To continue the story. Coffee was brought in, and on its heels came two black-eyed houris—Ouled Nails, Benzarti explained.

Both of the girls were passably good-looking, and one had almost a sweet expression on her olive face, which was oval in shape with a rather finely-chiselled nose. They spoke French, of course, very well, and as I lazily sipped the coffee (not nearly so good as that to be obtained in any decent London restaurant) I cross-questioned the lady, who rejoiced in the name of Khadava (the Queen) in my own mild way. Much to Benzarti's chagrin, it was not long before I discovered that on ordinary occasions she was a Greek from Smyrna. Khadava admitted with the most sweet of cynical smiles that it was only to English and Germans that she confessed to being an Ouled Nail—it was found to be more profitable. We laughed pleasantly together.

Probably her nationality accounted for her beautiful black hair, which was prettily covered by a red silk handkerchief, looped up under behind. Heavy gold earrings in the shape of simple rings hung from her ears. In the way of clothing she had on a white chemise, a gold-flowered corsage of silk, and orange silk foutah and rose-coloured pantaloons of the 'demi-collante' description. Her little bare feet were shoved into yellow Turkish slippers. (Had she been out shopping she would of course have worn French shoes with Louis XIV heels !) Silver and gold bangles, heavy and tasteless in design, decorated her wrists and ankles.

Always a seeker after knowledge, I asked her how her 'dot' was getting on. She smilingly replied that it was most satisfactory, thank you ; that men were more than ever foolish and that even now she spent her spare time on the terrace looking at the stars and dreaming of Tanit and the joys of married life. She closed the whole with a cheery smile.

"Who," said I, "is Tanit ?"

"Tu ne connais pas Tanit, étoile du monde, déesse de l'amour et de la maternité !"

I bowed my head abashed.

By this time Benzarti was getting completely cut out of the conversation, and professional pride behoved that he should again take a hand at any cost ; so he suggested a song and tom-toms. Not knowing what I was in for, I agreed.

From some dark corner the native drums were produced ; curious wooden cylinders they were, covered with a sort of bladder. Then off the houris started.

It was the most dreary performance that I have ever heard in my life. "Ah—ah—ah—ah—aha-aha-ah" *da capo ;* at least that was how the tune sounded—the words being unintelligible to the untrained ear of the West, perhaps fortunately. After about six bars I stopped the awful performance.

"Benzarti, go down one!" I said, "and call for the bill!" He looked at me, saw I would stand no nonsense and silently paid our scot. . . .

It was really quite refreshing to get out into the open air again.

"Monsieur," commenced my mentor, "il y a une danse nègre ce soir. Faut la voir."

"No," said I sternly, at the same time pocketing the information. "You have lied to me once in the hopes of greater backsheesh. I will not again be led from the paths of virtue. Here's your money. Go!"

Needless to say, however, I was quite full of the afternoon's work when Thomson appeared on the scene. He agreed that the dance might be worth seeing if we could do it on our own. Feeling ourselves a little more 'débrouillé' (that is almost as good and popular an Algerian word as 'vaillant'; without one of these you never address anyone or anything), we loafed round in search of information which we eventually ran to earth near the Mosque Djama-el-Djerid. A nice little story is connected with the Mosque el-Djerid, which, as is well known, takes the form of a cross. The yarn is so old that it has perhaps ceased to be stale and consequently I will inflict it on the reader.

The mosque was built in 1660 by a Christian slave who thought to take revenge for all his insults and wrongs by planning this stronghold of the Prophet in the form of a cross, and for a time the architect took great joy from his subtle jest—until his captors saw the point. Finally, of course, he was boiled in oil to show that a Moslem is, at any rate, good at repartee. But the real point is that the zealous followers of Mahound carefully refrained from destroying or even architecturally purifying the proceeds of the sin. It was quite sufficient to sacrifice the author, 'to take the cash and let the credit go'! The East and the West are not so very afar apart in some things, after all!

I cannot quite bring to mind the precise reason for the 'festin' to which we eventually wended our way. Very likely there was none, a point which has no real bearing on the question.

In an open flagged court we came upon the festive party. None but men were to be seen on the ground; veiled women were only visible in the upper storeys. Some striped mats were scattered about on which were seated the musicians, singers, and dancers, the latter sitting in a row in front of the musicians, who played several sorts of instruments; the dabourks or earthenware drum, a sort of antiquated flute—djaouak, and an alto with three cords, amongst other things. The whole strange scene was lit up by the flickering light of torches. On a high-backed seat sat the 'directrice' of the dance, a huge negress in spangled chiffon and velvet.

Whilst the musicians beat the rhythm and the big drums or reggs rumbled under the strokes of their iron drum-sticks, the chorus sang monotonously on till the end of the phrase, which they finished by a fusillade of sharp cries.

One and all, the dancers were coal-black negresses. There was nothing of the Pavlova about them; in fact they rather bordered on the elephantine in size and in movement.

See this mass of kaleidoscopic scarves, tinkling jewels and shimmering sequins advance to the orchestra, sway before it to indicate her rhythm and then—gallumph around. Her movements are heavy and there is but little of the graceful about her hands and arms; yet you see her body jerk to and fro as if under stress of terrible internal excitement, the sluggish contortions are cut here and there by sharp jerks of seeming pain. Now you understand the absolute and bestial savagery underlying all. That frenzied mind to which the sight of ghastly suffering comes as a draught of wine.

It seems a fitting end to the cheerful sight that blood should flow. You await a sacrifice. I fancy that the knives with which they cut the throats of the wretched animals were purposely blunt.

I departed with a shiver down my back and a sight of pegged-out, sun-bleached skeletons before my eyes.

After this little entertainment we omitted to visit the Aissouas, fanatics who turn themselves into pincushions and so forth for a trifling obole; but I believe for the jaded appetite it is a sight to be thoroughly recommended.

As cemeteries have an attraction for most people born in the Victorian Era, I can recommend an afternoon in watching the people hovering about the plain little dried brick graves that look like nothing so much as miniature Nonconformist chapels! Friday is a good day; except that only women are admitted to the cemeteries, a fact which is rather taken advantage of on occasion, one learns. But 'that is as it may be!' to quote Lieutenant Pistol.

If you are fortunate enough to pass the horde of guides, kourlourlis, and coricolos on the Place du Gouvernement with safety, which may be done if you do not stand too long gazing open-mouthed at the statue of the Duc d'Orléans in the middle—a grand gentleman seated in majestic incompetence on a horse that looks for better days—you may pass from the glaring sunlight and the heated stones to the comparative cool and quiet of the Rue de la Marine. Personally I think it better to keep in the shade of the trees that border the square, amongst the kiosks and flower-stalls and the cosmopolitan crowd; this is especially true if the Zouave Band happens to be performing on the Place.

Supposing that you have slipped through the waiting bandits and their more open cousins, the avowed beggars, like a company of éclaireurs, you arrive in due course at the portals of the Mosque el-Djerid and there you are taken in hand by an attendant who hands you slippers wherewith to cover your unholy shoes.

It is explained that you must carefully keep to the carpet; and really it is well to provide the anxious visitor with something to interest him whilst within the sacred portals. The interior is bare and whitewashed, with a severe but not unpleasant simplicity of pillar and arch. Walls and pillars alike are covered with matting to a height of some four feet. This is to obviate undue dirt, for in the East, when sitting down, all follow the blessed example of Mark Twain's horse, which wanted to lean up against the wall and think. When your Mussulman prays, on the other hand, he stands turned towards Mecca, facing a pillar or the wall that no one may come between him and Allah.

It is interesting to think of the number of a true believer's ablutions in the course of the day, supposing he attends the mosque, as a devout man would do, some five times.

To begin with, every mosque has its fountain for the use of the faithful; though down South, where water is scarce, sand may be employed.

Commencing with the phrase "In the name of the living and merciful God, I desire to pray," the worshipper washes his hands, gargles, and aspires water through the nostrils; then he washes his arms up to the elbow, beginning with the right. Afterwards he washes his whole face and his ears, passing from one to the other behind the head. Lastly comes the turn of his feet. This is done three times before praying; multiply this by the number of prayers per diem, that is to say five at sunrise, at 1 p.m., at 3 p.m. when the sun begins to go down, at dusk and also at eight o'clock; now see what you think of the total. How many of the most practising of Christians can boast of such a performance, even upon Sunday, that day of holy works and heavy meals?

Incontestably there is more to see in the Mosque Djama-el-Kebir than in poor old Djama-el-Djerid. The only claims to interest that this last can legitimately maintain as a 'sight'—oh, awful word!—are its clock-tower and its shape, the bearing of which latter on the career of the architect I noted before. It contains, I believe, a manuscript edition of the Koran. But in all probability visitors would prefer to peruse their Baedekers; personally I did neither.

Coming to the fine façade of El-Kebir, on the other hand, one is struck by the numerous arcades and the exquisite white marble pillars that support them; right in the centre is a splendid black marble fountain.

It is pleasing also to note that the minaret has a good opinion of itself. On the staircase there runs an inscription: "What minaret has a beauty equal to that of mine? Do I not compete with the moon?" This minaret was, it is said, built between October 1323 and the following March, which proves a somewhat forgotten fact—that you can build quickly without being a jerry-builder. Tachfin, Sultan of Tlemcen, was the builder of the mosque in the year of the Hedjira 409. All honour to him!

As regards the interior, one finds much the same bareness as we noticed in El-Djerid, except that there is rather a handsome mimbar or pulpit.

CHAPTER III

ALGIERS GRAVE AND GAY

IN such a fanatically religious country as Algeria the hierarchy must be accorded due honour of place, so I now propose to glance at it.

Let me first premise that, as with us, there is more than one style of church.

The parish church proper is the 'mosque'; next follows the 'zaouia,' which is a sort of 'mosque' with a school attached—something after the style of the old monastic schools; these two alone are served by the official clergy. Finally we reach the 'koubba' or chapel, which is simply the tomb of some marabout or saint; these are served by the unofficial clergy, the marabouts. The marabout, by the way, is born, not made; his rank is hereditary. Don't blush, gentle reader; some of the most prominent of the African saints have been very much married indeed, as we shall see further on. It is somewhat curious to note that maraboutism is peculiar to North Africa.

Lower in the scale come the churchless ones, the 'khouans' or religious associations, about whom we shall have a further talk. And lowest of all, but, thank Heaven for human gullibility, not least, the 'ouali,' the 'friends of God,' the charlatans, the pickers-up of unconsidered trifles. So the effete East has risen to the occasion in one direction at any rate —and adopted American methods. In fact I doubt if the whole of Christendom could summon forth as many holy mendicants as this little stretch of North Africa.

The official clergy are paid by the French Government, and are more or less loyal, especially as the system of espionage is quite good.

The marabouts and smaller fry get what they can, and I am glad to say do it pretty successfully. Frequently they are as openly against the powers that be as the moral courage of a native will permit. In which case of course, the police have to rely upon the old maxim that when three Arabs are plotting together, nine times out of ten, one is a police-spy and the other two will rush round to the 'commissariat de police' to forestall him in the treachery.

A 'mufti' has almost the rank of a bishop. He interprets the law from the pulpit every Friday, and prays for the sovereign; his salary is anything from 1200 to 4000 francs a year. Many of these gentlemen are, as one would expect, men of the highest intelligence; they study for the Algerian Bar and, on occasion, seek municipal honours before taking orders. They and the Roman Catholic Fathers mutually respect each other.

Next lower in the scale stands the 'imam,' who recites the necessary prayers and holds, in fact, much the position of a vicar or curé. His salary runs from 300 to 1500 francs a year. As a class they have but little authority, which perhaps accounts for the French Government paying them much on the scale of the Vicar of Wakefield.

Undoubtedly the religious force of the country lies in the hands of the marabouts.

Besides the above-mentioned, several other officers are attached to the mosque; namely 'tolbas,' who read the litanies and so forth; 'hezzabin,' or readers of the Koran; 'muezzin,' whose duty it is to summon the faithful to prayer from the minarets; an 'oukil' or treasurer, and an assistant 'oukil,' called a 'chouach.' To give them their due, I believe most of these officers are quite estimable men. The experience of Tartarin with the muezzin in his little 'affaire de cœur' was probably unique, or nearly so.

I regret that my friend showed no abiding taste for the more serious side of life, and flatly refused to penetrate further into the religious life of Islam.

"My dear boy," said he, "I believe I am correct in stating that there is going to be an excellent show on to-night at the Hippodrome?"

"Lady wrestlers?"

"Exactly! What a truly excellent chance for studying the local mentality under moments of stress and excitement. Will you come?"

I agreed, of course; at such moments there is always safety in numbers.

So I was left to visit the Jardin de Marengo by myself, and alone hold converse with the shades of Sidi Abd-er-Rahman, and the mosque of his name which stands close by. Foolishly, I went by the Rue Bab-el-Oued and cut up by the Lycée, which was a mistake; it is much better, as I found out later, to take the tram to the Kasbah and walk down the Boulevard Valée, enjoying all the while the most excellent view over the Bay and town, and so come down by pleasant paths directly on to the mosque itself.

There is not much of the novel about the place. Its interest lies rather in the fact that Sidi Abd-er-Rahman gave his name to the sect Ramayana, which has always been particularly fanatical in its resistance to the French. According to report, the saint in question was as bloodthirsty a murderer as ever donned a halo; and in this I think most people will agree on hearing the following story about him.

One day he met a faction of the Beni-Salah worshipping the Lord during Rhamadan and employing in their practices the time-honoured rites of the song and dance. Without investigating the matter by a select committee, or even by a drum-head court-martial, he gathered together sundry members of his own tribe, naturally only too willing to do a little blood-letting in a good cause, and hunted the wretched Beni-Salah on to the edge of a precipice.

Of course the occasion was too good to be lost, so he took the opportunity of doing a bit of whole-hearted cursing, thereby showing them the imminence of their peril and the utter error of their ways. Having thus induced in them a satisfactory state of mind he drove the whole lot over the edge!

Stay! He had another claim to fame. He always cleaned out his stable with his burnous!

A more pleasant person to my mind was Sidi Mancour, whose 'koubba' lies close by. This convivial person belonged to that period when the good Emperor Charles V, of blessed memory, sat without the gates of Algiers.

Verily it was the Sidi who kept him sitting; for, behold, one day the saint had been looking into the flowing bowl and rejoicing greatly therein. To such measure, indeed, that his friends and a constable or two urged him to cool his poetic brain in the refreshing waters of the ocean. After a short discussion Sidi was deposited gently but firmly in about four feet of water—and held under. When he managed to reach the shore again he not unnaturally felt some annoyance, as a strong man will, with those cooling waves that had treated him so brutally—and he beat upon them with his slippers in anger.

Allah was greatly pleased at the display of such spirit on the part of a true believer. In proof, he sent a mighty tempest that utterly destroyed the greater part of the fleet of His Most Catholic Majesty, then riding proudly on the Bay. Well, the Sidi was no fool, and furthermore the salt water had got into his interior. So he began to think hard.

When the crowd was sufficiently smitten with the glory of their victory over the infidel, he explained with feeling how deeply he wrestled in the spirit with the evil genius of the Christian dogs, and how fervently he had communed with Allah for the love of all the faithful. How Allah had sent him forth as a seer amongst men in the guise of a drunken wastrel that he might see more closely into the human heart; and finally, how Allah had acknowledged him as his very own, to the glory of the Crescent and the destruction of the Giaour. There being no one of authority on the beach at the time to stop him before the onlookers got interested, his reputation was speedily established; so much so that the clergy with wry face had to acknowledge the interloper. Once having arrived, Sidi was not the man to depart before he was duly canonised.

And so we come almost to the end of 'mosque' and 'koubba,' but not without a memory of Ahmed, last Bey of Constantine, of whom the less said the better. We will merely confine ourselves to recalling one of his peculiarities, namely that of having his French prisoners eaten alive by dogs.

Now let us turn to a place of lighter entertainment, whither you must imagine my companion and myself directing our steps after a little dinner at the Taverne Gruber which brought considerable comfort to body and mind. There was a ragout of particular succulence washed down with a draught of Burgundy. Of the omelette I have the most tender memories to this day (it was only beaten once on my trip).

None of your fixed price dinners for me; it is mistaken economy, as you are offered dishes for which you have not the slightest desire, to the end that your savings may pay for some terrible liqueur destined to drown the memories of the last hour's misery.

There is quite a nice little digestive rise up the Rue Dumont-d'Urville as you come to the Place d'Isly. It is well to shake yourself down before entering the Casino, for there is but little comfort to be obtained from the narrow seats of that Temple of Thespe.

Whatever distress of body you may feel is more than likely to be accentuated by the audience—unwittingly, of course.

Such a babel of sounds and rolling syllables in almost every accent under the sun it would be difficult to imagine. What with Frenchmen talking Spanish, Spaniards talking French, Italians talking both, and all of them, in the vilest patois imaginable, discoursing with their acquaintances from one end of the hall to the other, you are only too willing to shut your ears until the familiar tum-tum-tum reminds you that the curtain is already some half an hour overdue in the rising.

At last we get under way, however, and settle down to enjoy the performance—or not, as the case may be. There are the usual inane 'diseuses,' who make up for their lack of voice by their length of limb. In a demure way they make insinuations about the morals of the world in general. These are followed by the usual fatuous comedians in 'képi' who echo the vile slanders about the morals of the 'tambour major,' whilst the audience rolls with delight. On occasion it translates these jokes into the vulgar tongue—a tongue which can be very vulgar indeed.

In Algiers they call a spade a spade—when they do not call it the other thing; in fact, the language is strongly reminiscent of some of our more developed mining towns. It is a state of affairs for which the French are only too pleased to blame the 'mentalité' of the Spaniard and the Italian, whom they delight to class together as being on a lower mental plane. I hesitate to reproduce the precise language in which the assertion was repudiated by an Italian with whom I got into conversation on the subject. This same pleasure in the 'mot cru' is remarkable in the journals of the lower order. I understand that it is supposed to lend vigour to style. There is, of course, no censorship, and the result is one which cannot but be regretted by everyone who admires the French language, ill though it becomes a foreigner to speak concerning a language which is not his own.

It would seem, indeed, as if these 'néo-français,' as they rejoice to call themselves, are trying to create a language of their own! To-day that language appears to be passing through the same birth-pangs as American. Though, as one would expect from the quicker Latin brain, it is developing more rapidly.

Everybody does a little in the poetry line, much in the same manner as in the period of the Renaissance, when everyone of education could knock you up a verse or two at an instant's notice. With this difference, however—in almost all the Renaissance verselets there is a dainty little thought tucked away somewhere in a lyrical dress that is at any rate fresh and bright. Algerian poesy knows but very little of such originality, either in thought or measure.

From the lyre to the mat is a far cry, so I must apologise if I return to earth again, over-rapidly. The behaviour of the wrestlers throws rather an interesting light on the new character that is forming 'là-bas.' But if either my friend or I could have guessed what an unpleasant spectacle was in store for us, we would have withstood easily the temptation of witnessing it.

Imagine some eight or ten strapping young women, drawn from various quarters of the globe, clad in black skin tights. They are pitted against each other, and commence to wrestle in the catch-as-catch-can style. The sight is not uninteresting at first, rather bizarre if you will, but nothing else; as soon, however, as the girls get somewhat excited and overheated the spectacle loses any resemblance it may ever have had to the Spartan games. In that smoke-filled room, across the savage glare of the footlights, the towsled hair, the blazing eyes, the panting bosoms, the perspiring skin—tomato-coloured with exertion and rough handling—go to make a picture than which it would be difficult to conceive anything more revolting.

Brazil provided the 'pièce de résistance' of the evening in Señorita Q, as we will call her, who was at least half Indian; probably two-thirds of the other half hailed from the banks of the Zambesi rather than the Plata. Her opponent, Mademoiselle X, was undoubtedly made of the stern stuff they breed up in Normandy.

As was only to be expected, the Frenchwoman got the lion's share of the applause as they took the mat, the more especially as the Brazilian was large of limb and could give her opponent at least a stone in weight.

All the applause that the Señorita received came from a little band of Spaniards seated on my left. She looked distinctly annoyed, but cheered up considerably on seeing what advantage she had in height and girth over the Frenchwoman. Considering the ease with which her weight had crushed the other comers, she foresaw quite an easy victory.

But when she discovered that Mademoiselle knew all the tricks of the trade, was three times as quick and quite as strong, her point of view changed. Then she brought forward her little battery of unconsidered trifles, such as banging the other girl's head on the floor, trying to tear her hair out by the roots, and suchlike manœuvres. Several times the referee interfered, and at each time there arose that "Hou! hou!" from the gallery that leads to trouble. From somewhere in the background and, of course, from my neighbours, there was a constant, if not very vociferous, Spanish backing for the lady whom we christened the Brazil Nut. The rounds were of rather long duration; the Frenchwoman's stamina stood the test much better than the other girl's, whilst her extremely sportsmanlike behaviour endeared her to most of the spectators. The Brazilian completely lost her head and began to gibber, at the same time trying to rush at her opponent during the intervals and so force the poor thing on to the sharp edges of the flies of the stage. You would have thought that such behaviour would have lost her the sympathy of the whole audience; not a bit of it.

When it was quite obvious that the Frenchwoman was winning, the Italian and Spanish section seemed to take up the cudgels on the Brazilian's behalf. The foulest abuse was shouted, and it looked as if there was going to be a riot. Gendarmes began to slip quietly into the hall. An unexpected double-nelson suddenly put an end to the Señorita's career, and to all appearances just in time. Either there were too many police in the building, or the Southern element was not in sufficiently great force for the moment to take the initiative; but nothing happened for the time being.

When the prize-giving took place I saw a greater ebullition of temper than I have ever seen before. In due course the Brazilian received her prize—the second. She was furious. Swore the French girl had cheated, waved the cheque at the audience and finally, tearing the slip of paper in pieces, she threw it on the ground and jumped on it. Curtain!

Sticks were brandished to such an extent that things looked ugly. Eventually the winner and the manager held a short consultation.

It ended in Mademoiselle offering to wrestle the Señorita again on the following evening. So we all quieted down and went home in peace.

So much for the amalgamation of races in the Algerian nation.

It is extremely difficult to find a gendarme in Algiers at any time. So when my friend and I noticed that we were being followed by a gang of 'apachés' down the Bab-Azoun we found considerable effort was required to maintain due decorum and avoid walking, as Mark Twain puts it, with 'celerity.' As we both prided ourselves on keeping a pretty good look-out, I hesitate to say which of us was the first to espy a friendly group of 'agents' discreetly hidden in the shadows. We pointed our followers out to the friendly arm of the law and continued our way quietly.

Though Frenchmen of the metropolis are divided into several hundred camps with regard to the intelligence of the colonial 'né,' there is only one as to his desire for education. A very general complaint is that he will not learn. Like colonials of other nations, the Algerian regards his own intelligence and aptitude in every respect superior to that of the Frenchman from the old country. This opinion is undoubtedly fostered by the local press, assisted in no small measure by a certain section of the Parisian papers, whose directors have their own axes to grind. (It is reported that the result is most satisfactory at the polls.) All this tends very naturally to put into the head of 'néo-français' the idea that his natural capabilities enable him to pick up a subject without bothering to study it seriously. It is not so very long ago that there were three professors of Egyptology and not one of French at the University of Algiers!

The Algerian has not escaped the worship of bureaucracy which so essentially differentiates the Old World from the New; nor that pension-maggot which has always found such good feeding in the Latin mind. Everybody, then, who studies does so with the sole idea of getting a Government post—and pension. No matter how small the salary is—and it is astonishing how microscopic the French official's salary can be on occasion—a man would far rather take that, knowing that at sixty or some such age he will receive a pension for the rest of his natural life, than run the risk of a struggle for life with its attendant anxious stress. Needless to say, the poor deluded student runs the gamut of the snippets of knowledge with the brilliant execution of a pianola—and as much mental benefit.

Or he may make his debut into journalism, with results that are not lacking in interest.

As to the native, he is not inadequately dealt with in the matter of higher education. Though perhaps this is scarcely the place to touch on the native elementary school, we can at any rate speak of the Medersa. In this institution the future magistrates of Mussulman persuasion complete their education. There one can take courses in French, Arabic, Geography, History, Science.

Efforts are also being made to resuscitate the ancient industry of carpet-making, in order that the women may make some small steps towards a higher mental life.

As the past of the Algerian carpet was never a thing of surpassing brilliance, and as the aniline dyes of the Jews, which are as cheap as they are hideous, have quite succeeded in destroying the strength or delicacy of the colour schemes, the idea has been introduced of making use of all the classic oriental designs.

When one recollects that the native is never a very good hand at developing, or even of adapting, an idea, it is not surprising that things have not reached quite the high standard that was intended by the promoters; yet the idea is essentially a worthy one, and one hopes it will succeed.

Not to put too fine a point on the matter, the

Medersa is one of the happiest architectural adventures of the French into the Arab domain. Putting aside the fact that the building looks more like a mosque than a college, there is something in its white severity of outline that seems distinctive of all that is best in the native mind—clarified 'à la Française, bien entendu!'

Pity it is that the other buildings of Mustapha Supérieur are not of the same high calibre. Here at least the Cross has been routed by the Crescent. So whilst you ascend the long hill—by tram if you are wise—that leads to the Colonne de Voirol, contrive to turn your back on the sad orgy of plaster, and look out over the Bay. By this method you will avoid at any rate a certain amount of ocular distress, and will realise how the simple beauty of a slender tree and the distant scintillation of a glorious sunbeam may sanctify the grotesque enormities of self-confident jobbing.

Practically the whole European colony with any pretence to wealth lives in the Franco-Moorish horrors of Mustapha Supérieur.

The Governor, of course, has a palace of some magnitude, and sets an architectural example that might be followed with profit by his neighbours. I refer more particularly to the entrance of the building, which has a charming and dignified simplicity.

Men of lesser note, not content with letting their architects' worst dreams have full play, must needs cap all by christening their houses both in French and Arabic ; as if the local ‘ manes,’ having been smitten on one cheek, in the manner of provincial horseplay, were commanded to turn the other that their beard might be pulled by the passing dusky loafer. It is a sad sight, so we will leave it without regret.

CHAPTER IV

RULERS AND RULED

CHOOSE your day well when you desire to visit the Jardin d'Essai; beware lest you get caught in the rain. If such indeed be your bad luck you are more than liable to be so distressed by the sordid tram-ride thither between factory and hovel, amidst an infernal clatter as the heavy carts jolt over the paved and sadly rutted road, that you are like to turn back, your task unfinished; or, worse still, you may be compelled to seek shelter in the Moorish café over the way that Fromentin delighted to honour—and be sorely disappointed. Whatever the place was like when the eminent poet-artist frequented it, there is but little doubt as to its present appearance. To accurately visualise this home of romance, call to your mind a collection of fly-blown 'ginguettes' of the outer boulevards bereft of customers.

Should you, on the other hand, find that the gods have been propitious, you are in for a treat.

Three great avenues run from the Route d'Aumale to the sea. One is planted with magnificent plane-trees, another with date-trees of rare excellence and size, a third with the octopus-like dragon-tree, whose sap is gluey, thick and red as blood. Then come the avenues of the magnolia, the fig-tree, the gum-tree, where overhead the branches cross, interlaced like the rafters of a roof and almost as symmetrically. At the foot the roots train like the writhing locks of Medusa. Of the endless variety of exotics growing there it would be absolutely impossible for me, at any rate, to speak. So when I have mentioned the forty-foot yuccas, the Bourbon palms, the bamboos, the rosy acacias, the blue-flowered jocorondas, I pass you over to the *Encylcopædia Britannica* in the hope you will enjoy yourself, and the pious desire that you will not ask me to learn the list of trophies of your note-book and pencil.

Poor old Jardin d'Essai! Like the rest of us, it has had its ups and downs. Founded about 1832, it nearly died under the red-tape swaddlings of the Government. Subsequently it was surrendered to the tender mercies of a society, together with a fair share of the wherewithal; like a poor relation that suddenly comes into money, it went and squandered it. Getting rich quickly was not exactly good for it and so, when about forty, its affairs were wound up. To follow the human parallel to the bitter end, the unfortunate debtor has been taken over by another company as a sort of jack-of-all-trades and made to sweat for its living—sweat like the very deuce too! When next you buy a baby potted palm in the street for as little as the coster will accept, kindly remember that it is most probably a tiny drop of sweat from the weary brow of the Jardin d'Essai d'Alger, and treat it kindly. From those drops the taskmasters extract four thousand pounds of gold per annum.

I do not mean to say that the Jardin does not go in for more aristocratic work. On the contrary, it carries out costly experiments in the search for that Algerian philosopher's stone—the ideal culture.

It has been driven into the heads of the French nation that Algeria was in Roman times, and ought now to be, the garden and the granary of Europe. Useless to point out to the Frenchman that a Roman historian was quite as capable of lying as a modern one, that the 'prospectus élégant' was not unknown in classic times; he will either scorn to reply to your biassed cynicism, or shatter you with an erudite quotation that binds one more strand of the cord of his conservative faith, that faith which believes that everything old is good—except hereditary monarchy.

The result is not very far to seek. Whilst the colonial of French extraction is shoved and harried into the agricultural line, where he may possibly pick up a living, the Italian and the Spaniard lay hold of the more succulent plums of commerce, and mechanical arts and mining, whence they amass largely of the goods of this world to the end that they wax fat and multiply exceedingly. They care less than the Frenchman for the views of the Roman, their nearer relative, on any subject, and absolutely nothing for his theories on modern Algeria. If these gentlemen find Providence kind under the circumstances, how much more so the Jew!

This brings us near the knuckle; very near it indeed, one might say! The whole secret of the anti-Semite troubles in Algeria is to be found in the fact that the Hebrew can beat a Frenchman at a business deal. Straight or crooked, it does not matter. Hence the scandals of the Reign of Régis. But let me start with that Bacri of whom I previously made mention.

Bacri was a Jew of Algiers in the days of Hussein, that is to say, about the year of Our Lord 1830. His partner, by name Busnach, was like unto him.

Bacri and his partner had made to the Directorate certain important consignments of corn, which the Directorate had not completely paid for—much as a man about town always has a bit in hand with his tailor, that he may so ensure proper and faithful service for the future. The Empire, honest soul, gave a little more on account; in 1819 the whole matter was arranged for the sum of seven million francs—on paper.

Now comes the cream of the joke. Bacri and Busnach were debtors to certain French interests which were specially safeguarded by the convention. Discussions arose, and a certain part of the money was kept back whilst the affair was being talked over in the courts. Hussein Dey, as was only to be expected, had considerable interest in the matter, amounting to two or three million francs; though, poor fellow, he was but little better than a cat's-paw all through, for Bacri, Busnach and Co. bought and sold against him in every direction.

After a while Hussein got tired of the slow and expensive manœuvres of the 'chats fourrés.' Not being able to get hold of the precious pair, he actually had the impudence to make direct application to the King of France for his money, saying that the contending parties would receive justice before his own tribunal! Is it to be wondered at that he had no reply?

Deval, the French consul, was consequently between the upper and the lower millstone; that Deval was originally a Levantine of but small account undoubtedly added to the piquancy of the conversations. Questions led to answers, and both to an explosion of temper. The Dey struck Deval with his fan . . . 'et voilà!'

Such is the history of the French conquest of Algeria! As the Jew had a hand in the beginning, so has he kept his grasp on the guiding-rein ever since; of course, interesting the Christian in his little ventures to some extent for safety's sake. So it continued down to the days of Maximiliano Régis Milano—Max Régis—who started his career by demanding the dismissal of a Jewish professor from the University.

Feeling had been rising for many years after the Edict Crémieux, which naturalised the Jew, whilst leaving the Arab still in the odious position of the vanquished nonentity. People saw, or imagined they saw, in it but a further and astuter move on behalf of the Israelite to obtain even more of the loaves and fishes.

In 1884 things came to a head with the departure of the year's conscripts; at the farewell reunion a distinction was made in the treatment of the Jews and the others. Result—a fearful hullabaloo and mutual recriminations, followed by a general sack of Jewish shops.

The opera-bouffe career of Régis is too recent to need repeating, but the thing to remember is that he was elected Mayor of Algiers on the anti-Semite ticket.

One curious fact in regard to the relations between the Latin of Algiers and the Jew seems to rest in the former's dissatisfaction with whatever the Jew does. For example, we have just seen with what horror the Press regarded the entrance of the Chosen People into public life through the agency of the Crémieux Law; a feeling no doubt due in great part to the increased facilities that the Hebrew obtained for making money, an art in which he was already more proficient than his Christian neighbours.

Now, observe how the Algerian mentality—as exemplified by the newspapers—takes the next point. It proclaims in no uncertain voice that the gregarious habits of the said Jew are unsociable and—unrepublican! The colonist will not have him on the platform, to which end he periodically revises the roster—against the Jews, of course; but on the other hand he says:

"Come and be one of us. Herd not together under the shadow of the synagogue!" for the Israelite clings to the synagogues in Algiers as he does to Park Lane in London!

Do not imagine, however, that because the Christian unites with his brother against the common enemy that there is no note of discord within the camp itself. At the election booths the Spaniard and the Italian lead the attack on the Chambre 'tambour battant' against the French and against one another; whilst the unhappy ruler of soil has to fight a rear-guard action against both at the same time that he tries to cough up the evil pill of discord that is upsetting his own vitals.

Can you wonder that the Spaniards go to work with a whoop when even the French deputies make appeal to them in their own tongue by voice and poster? It is quite a common thing for Saints' Days to be called by their Spanish or Italian names; on the Porte d'Espagne at Oran are engraven the Royal Arms of Spain; lastly, but not least, no Spaniard can suffer the extreme penalty without the French authorities first obtaining the King of Spain's consent to the execution!

Did I mention that the Spanish birth-rate is just about three times that of the French? Naturally, the Spaniard is all out to win. A somewhat soured diplomatist once said that Algeria was the only Spanish colony which had succeeded.

That is as it may be, but the above state of affairs is both interesting and complicated. When one has grasped the tremendous clashing of interests in the commerce of the country and their bearing on the voting urn, it will be easily comprehended what corruption exists in the ballot.

My companion and I were seated in the Square de la République, cadging cigarettes off each other, watching the pretty girls go by, and generally behaving in the manner that is expected of the British tourist, when suddenly I heaved a sigh; there was apparently no reason for it, and my companion looked at me in an interested way.

"I began to sigh yesterday," said he. "To-morrow I leave for Biskra."

"What?"

"Oh, don't get annoyed. I was about to suggest a move for you too."

"But what makes you think I want to move?" I replied in a rather pained way; not so much, mind you, from any objection to the idea as from a feeling that I had been forestalled in the expression of it. His words exactly diagnosed my case. I suddenly realised that I did want to move.

"That's the worst of these advertised resorts," he went on. "Nothing is left for one to find out for oneself. Everything is explained with an utterly fatal lucidity."

"I don't see how that helps," said I. A sure sign how the ennui was touching me when my companion was getting at me all round.

" My dear boy, don't you see ? You get your impression, you write your preface to duly fix the thing in your mind ; then you go home and crib the rest in the Museum library. All one wants is the point of view ; other people do the rest. Come and have some tea and think it over."

After the first cup I saw reason in his argument ; after the second I was convinced of its justice. Certainly one has time for no more these days.

From such inconsiderate beginnings was born the Great Idea. It was the first time that I had ever suffered with a Great Idea, and I liked it accordingly. In fact, I liked it so much that in a few minutes Thomson got annoyed and asked me what it was. I suppressed my chuckles and lit a cigarette, that I might speak with nonchalance.

" What would you say," I asked, " if I were to become a Great Explorer ? "

" I should say you were a Damn Fool ! "

That was hardly what I expected, and I hastened to explain ; to be really enjoyed, ' kudos ' must be served up piping hot.

" Well now, look here," said I. " Many men of much brilliance and talent have written about Algeria, and my mind is bathed in the colours of Romance, but——"

" You are afraid of rubbing them off in a dust-bin ! "

"Such levity and cynicism is utterly uncalled for. What I meant to say was that I want to get into the Innermost Inness of Things. Such an Insight can only be obtained, I feel sure, in the country. The mind and appearance of the town native are horribly contaminated by the European."

"As I said!"

This was most irritating.

"Come along," I replied, "and help me to buy a bike."

"Where are you going?"

"To Biskra!"

"To Blazes!" But the man's eye brightened despite himself, and my object was achieved. A *volte-face* is always amusing, so I smiled gently as he opened out.

"You will want a map—" he began.

"—And some money!"

"—And a revolver——"

"—And a change of clothes——"

"A camera—" he continued, unabashed.

"—And some Keating's," I went on. "However, as you do seem to take a vast interest in the business after all, come along and give me the benefit of your experience." This was, of course, just what he wanted, and, incidentally, myself.

'There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in thy philosophy, Horatio!' One of these is the scientific buying of underclothing.

Algiers is scarcely London when it comes to the purchasing of kit ; more especially when one is somewhat hazy as to one's precise requirements. There is, fortunately, one compensation : the vendors are, of course, as full of misinformation, but on the other hand they have neither that diluted form of Yankee push which enables the West-End outfitter to persuade his client that to visit Montreal he must have a couple of Winchesters and a bowie-knife, nor have they sufficient selection for him to entrap himself. Mistakes are thus eliminated in some degree. The trouble frequently arises when one enquires into the quality of the article supplied.

The first thing to get was, of course, a bicycle.

Putting one thing with another, and having a vast distrust of the local roads—quite unfounded for the most part as it turned out—it looked as if it would be safest to rely on Algerian rather than on insular prejudice. Here we showed our wisdom, which augured well ; for though the few specimens of the English bicycle were of the 'never-to-be-forgotten' variety, I struck upon quite an excellent little Peugeot, such as the 'douaniers' use in the interior. My companion and I both liked the look of it, and we finally entered into treaty with the merchant, a jolly fat man from the Midi, with a red face and a big black beard. As I explained my reason for the machine he thrilled with delight from the collar of his alpaca coat to the soles of his carpet slippers. Eventually we struck a bargain whereby for an extremely reasonable sum he fitted the machine with a double gear, all accessories, including an extra tube and tyre, and a carrier. More than once I have heard people hold forth against the faulty workmanship to be met with in Algiers, but I must say here that the workmanship put into the fitting of that machine was of the most thorough and best; a fact to which I owed my life on one occasion at any rate.

Next we went along to take advice as to the route with the Comité d'Hivernage. Here again I met with the most exquisite courtesy. Within a couple of days I was promised two alternative routes and all available information. In due course they were submitted for my inspection, and the fullest information as to inns and the like provided. One of these I followed with but a slight deviation, and it is along that route that I hope the reader will have the patience to accompany me.

I got one invaluable piece of information; that consisted of the absolute necessity of thick underclothing for the change at night. It gets most desperately cold in the mountains after sundown. Mistakes in this direction generally lead to pneumonia of the double-barrelled variety.

I prepared for this by laying in a couple of woollen vests, strong pants, shirts, very stout knickerbockers—I wore khaki—stockings and shoes; and there you are as regards the clothing. One moment. A broadbrimmed hat to save my eyes a great deal of trouble, a white helmet I could easily get at Biskra if I wanted it. Should the day be uncomfortably hot, I could think of nothing better than a cabbage-leaf under the crown of my hat. Early in the year a spine-pad is not necessary, but a veil of some sort to cover the neck was deemed advisable, as I would be likely to want it when I dropped down towards the Sahara. If necessary, however, little things like that could be got at Sétif or Batna.

It had always been the ambition of my life to lay in a medicine chest. Here was an occasion too good to be missed; as an Anglo-Saxon concludes, in general, that in no other place than England are there country doctors to be found!

My companion, who was by way of being a doctor, lent himself to the delusion with a zest that was, I fear, not quite unmixed with the genial satisfaction of giving dictatorial advice where he was on perfectly safe ground; and I must say that his advice was of the best. "A bandage or two; some disinfectant; a little quinine and a flask of brandy. Let the rest go hang!" I think it is chiefly due to the simplicity of these directions and the fact that I had sufficient lack of conceit to follow them that I was not once ill on the way. I permitted myself the addition of a little vaseline; also a little phial of oil of lavender came in very handy. When sprinkled fairly and artistically on a doubtful bed—there are many such, off the beaten track and on it—it obviates those nocturnal 'battues' that are so apt to lead to acrimonious discussion with one's neighbours at cock-crow.

Money was soon arranged for on the relay system as being the safest and least inconvenient.

Next came the purchase of a lethal weapon. It was one of the very proudest moments of my life when I purchased the confounded thing, and one of the most utterly foolish when I tried to fire it. It looked such a pretty little toy when I bought it—one of those things that would not harm a fly, yet guaranteed to bring down a charging elephant at ten yards. As there is nothing like breaking oneself in young, I loaded the little darling and slipped it into my pocket; then spent the next few hours wondering when the safety catch was going to slip and the damn thing go off in my pocket.

Revolvers are all very well in their way, and rich in sensation; but when one really wants an endless fund of amusement, the correct thing to do is to buy a camera.

One of my friends who is given to harmless little dissipations of the lighter sort had bought a Goerz-Anschutz of an extremely fine brand. The lens alone cost I am afraid to say how many sovereigns. As for the rest of the apparatus, it simply bristled with knobs and wheels and catches; I have, indeed, never seen a camera that could do so much of its own accord; and when assisted by the human hand—well!

a horse jumping, a frog croaking, a fly scratching, all came the same to that camera. He lent it to me when I was going away! You may not believe it, but it is absolutely true. After that there was only one thing to be done, and that was to use it. So the doctor and I sallied forth with malice aforethought. We looked carefully into the matter, and I did the best I could to remember the precise meaning and duty of each knob, wheel, spring or catch. I forget how many plates we wasted in experiment; then we retired to a café to think matters over.

"What about getting a Kodak?" I said, after contemplating my empty glass for some minutes. I was a prey to the blackest despair.

"My dear boy, the Kodak is the instrument of the tr——! I mean perhaps it would be as well." Sadly smiling, and yet with a dawning hope in our faces, we wended our way to the little depôt over which we had made merry as we set out proud in the possession of a Goerz-Anschuz! My 'Brownie' cost me precisely eighteen francs, and was primarily responsible for this book.

With the exception of buying a map, of which the 'departmental' seemed the most satisfactory, the ways and means were now arranged. It was decided that, human destiny being uncertain to a degree, we should spend what might be our last evening together quietly over a bottle of rare vintage.

CHAPTER V

ROUND AND ABOUT ALGIERS

AFTER dining at our old friend Gruber, as I well remember, over a little *potage bonne femme*, a *sole colbert*, a trifle of game, and an omelette washed down with some excellent Chambertin, we retired to a neighbouring café to digest and play with the chessmen.

We had been playing about with the various openings and finally allowed one to develop into a game, when two elderly gentlemen of impeccable appearance seated themselves beside us. For some time they paid strict attention to their game of écarté. I was so immersed in the game that I did not see that they had turned their attention to our little efforts; it was therefore with some surprise that I heard one of them criticise a rather bold move of mine. Before I was aware of it, I was hotly defending its wisdom. The ice was broken; we got into conversation.

One of the men was tall and grizzled, soberly dressed in a rather threadbare suit of black, and looked as if he might be a 'militaire' just struggling along on his pension; the man at my side, on the contrary, was short and tubby, with an iron-grey beard, sharp grey eyes, and a rolling, cavernous laugh. Evidently his knowledge of chess, if not profound, was at any rate respectable, so the conversation was quite animated. I am sorry to say that the doctor did not take such an interest as he ought to have done in the talk, but continued to puzzle his brains over the trap I had laid for him.

"Oh, bother it," said he finally, "I really am too tired to-night. Come along, let's get home!"

"Won't you have a drink?" said grey-beard.

"No, thanks," I replied, seeing that there was something in the wind. He took it rather badly and made some remark about English lack of manners. I jumped up; on these occasions it is often advisable to be on one's feet first. Then I reached for my overcoat.

"Aha, monsieur, and my pocket-book!" he pointed dramatically to his coat, which I happened to have my hand on by mistake. I turned cold. I could prove my honesty at the police station; but then I did not want to go there, and it was easy to see the way things were tending, especially as several people looked round at the noise.

"You scoundrel——" I began, as the thing flashed across me in its entirety. A firm grasp on my arm restrained me. My friend put me gently aside and leant over the table.

"Look here," said he sternly to the man and speaking in English. "I know you. Remember old 'Doc' of Calabar? That's me! Just you shut your mouth or off you go again to sweet New Caledonia on time. Savvy?"

The man snarled, but held his peace. Collecting our belongings we turned and left the place, followed by as venomous a look as ever it was my fortune to receive. For some minutes we strolled along in silence; finally I broke in:

"Lucky your knowing that chap, wasn't it? I thought you seemed puzzled by something."

"Yes. I was trying to remember the face. Wasn't quite certain, but thought it worth risking anyway. Think I'll take a train to-morrow!"

I nodded; and determined to continue carrying lethal weapons.

Good as his word, the doctor was off early the next day; and having sampled the joys of Algiers, I must confess I felt very lonely until I got the bicycle. As ill luck would have it, a day or two later I ran right into the arms of our café friend just as I was coming out of a tobacconist's. I looked him hard in the face without saying a word, then very gently slipped my hand into my coat pocket. He started slightly; we passed without saying a word.

With the advent of the bicycle, gleaming like the Assyrian cohorts with green and gold, my melancholy vanished, and I took to getting up early in the morning, always a sign of mental alertness with any man, whether induced by toothache or a bankruptcy petition. To feel master of oneself is only one step from feeling master of the world.

There are many pleasant trips for the independent traveller that can be enjoyed around Algiers, and I determined on one to Guyotville, as soon as I had mastered the curious intricacies of my machine's double gear. It was a somewhat ingenious device that worked from the pedals alone. By the time that it had nearly thrown me under a tram for the second time, I came to the conclusion that it was patented by the devil. However, all things come to those who wait, and after a little while I got so expert that even the little shoeblacks ceased to laugh when I got awheel.

The road to Guyotville runs along the Avenue Malakoff beside the shore, out past the Fort des Anglais and the Christian and Jewish cemeteries. There is a good deal of bumpity-bumping to be done, as the French have allowed their penchant for the 'pavée' full play. It continues until you are past into Saint Eugène, a sordid outskirt of patched breeches and dirty children, where East and West meet in the factory to the glory of the devil and all his works. But once safely out of this place, you come to a nice macadamised road that winds round the foot of the hill and is bordered by pretty little villas of the Moorish type, with pleasant little gardens. The houses straggle out, and eventually you are left alone with the richly-coloured hillside and the deep blue of the sea. You pass lots of small gardens and orchards, where the French are striving so hard to force, by every means in their power, that intensive culture that has been the salvation of the Midi since the Phylloxera dealt its terrible blow.

One of the most extraordinary sights in Algeria is the constant vision of a life-and-death struggle between the human will and Dame Nature. Nature says:

"In taking this country under my wing, I apportion it a climate and conditions of land and water such as fit it well for the home of a hardy race of warriors and shepherds, a land of pasturage and grain. No vast wealth if you will, but enough for daily bread, and perhaps a little over. Yet am I generous in my gifts to those who seek that they may find. Deep down in the bowels of the earth lies a treasure-cave and great riches for the delver."

To which the Frenchman replies:

"That may be what you say; but I know better. My scientists and my journalists—especially my journalists—tell me that the climate of this modern paradise is eminently suited for tropical vegetation in conjunction with all the fine products of the intenser cultures of the Mediterranean Basin. What matter if their assumptions are based on wrong data? I will that it shall be so! Mines are vulgar; flocks the property of a barbarous race. I pin my faith to anything that is difficult to grow."

Dame Nature retorts in the only way left open to a lady, silently and effectively, by a sort of leguminous ostracism that is highly diverting to the onlookers if not to those in the forefront of the battle. The result is that the only cultures that pay in any shape or form are those which were introduced many long centuries ago, and so ably described by Ibn-al-Awam in the twelfth century. In all probability neolithic man found them already old in the land.

For the time being let me just quote one of the methods whereby such a remarkable result has been achieved. In order to select the happiest methods of dealing with the plants, it is, of course, eminently desirable to know the daily temperature and a respectable average taken. Only two little details were forgotten. One was that the registering thermometer was placed under cover in a sheltered nook at a height of 2·60 m. above the ground, and the other that the maximum and minimum for the day and night at ground-level were over 20° C. and under –20° C. respectively, the latter enduring the whole night practically! Great astonishment at the recurrence of frostbite.

But unfortunately neither vegetables nor animals make a practice of sleeping in mid-air, some eight or nine feet above the ground.

There are also the cruel winds from the North. So you see little market-gardens and orchards sheltered with artificial hedges of reeds, the more tender plants under the particular wing of a piece of straw matting held in a split twig. Some ingenuity is shown in the occasional use of the banana-tree as a natural sunshade. Primitive shelters if you will—but no doubt effective enough. The good people are so persuaded of the perfection of their climate, that it is only under protest, as it were, that they take even these primitive precautions.

Before we quite lose ourselves in the glory of the colouring of the slopes of Bouzarea, covered by dwarf palms and cactus and hedges of the cassissier, I ought to mention that if you pick your day—Wednesday—you may see the negresses going to sacrifice chickens to the Djnoun of the Cave of Saint Eugène and, to the accompaniment of the incantation of the 'Fal,' drink deep of his knowledge of forthcoming events. For he is reputed to be a very wise old gentleman and, I have no doubt, a close relative of the inhabitant of the Brass-bottle into whose feelings and character Mr. Anstey has so feelingly entered.

But supposing that you are not detained by a desire for knowledge, come with me past the fine old Moorish fort at Pointe Pescade to the Bains Romains. The baths have long been dead and buried, being incompatible with modern progress, as exemplified by the modern railway that runs over their grave. Let us descend at the old inn and partake of some little refreshment.

We enter a 'patio,' well sheltered by trees and prettily decked with flowers and plants. A few tables and benches are scattered about, and the noisy chatter of the domestics comes floating through the windows of the one-storeyed buildings that form the quadrangle. After carefully wheeling our bicycles out of the sun, and selecting the most shady spot, we sit down to a cannette of beer whilst the 'patronne' discourses to us of the past season and the baneful influence of the native in general and the inhabitants of Morocco in particular.

When people tell me of the virulence of racial feeling, of wars and rumours of wars, I always think of that lady to whom the little war over a patch of desert meant nothing more than the migration of the tourist and the consequent dwindling of trade returns. Newspapers might shriek and howl over the possibilities of a European conflagration, and the fate of French colonies; astute financiers might examine their passbooks with satisfaction; diplomatists might stroke their grey beards and consult *Old Moore's Almanac*—it was all the same to her.

"Il y a Monsieur Z. qui s'en va au Maroc—et les autres—et les autres! Que voulez-vous, monsieur? L'indigène—bouf!" It is ever thus.

When we have sufficiently charmed the good lady by letting her talk uninterruptedly for some minutes, we pass through the low courtyard out on to the cliff beyond; perhaps we shall descend the rich warm rock to dabble our feet in the purple water and watch the fishing-boats go by.

But this is not the way to reach Guyotville, and it behoves us to push on. So let us make the best of our way past Cap Caxine with its revolving light, perhaps just turning aside to the 'pepinière' of Ain Beinen, where all manner of trees are being trained the way they should go preparatory to being transplanted to the forests of Kabylia and the Atlas.

At Guyotville we come completely under the influence of the grape, therefore, as we are, before all, a staid people, and not given to the lighter forms of intoxication, we will turn up to the left through its well-ordered square, squeeze past the church, and on up into the hills.

I counsel this because if you persist on your straight and narrow road through Guyotville you come to endless vineyards and monotony. Let those who like the narrow way keep to it; we will breast the hill, get the clean pure air into our lungs, and altogether take a more healthy and sane view of life.

There is a good deal of climbing to be done before we get to Cheragas, and we are probably more happy than we will admit to avail ourselves of the time-honoured excuse about the view.

Well, well, let us turn and have a look then, over the green orchards, the vineyards, the red-roofed houses so exquisitely covered with bougainvillea. We say, "Heavens! What a way we have come! It must be the air!" It is the air, and verily, we shall know a good deal more about it before we have finished.

The Mediterranean in its shimmering blueness stretches away in the distance, with white sails scattered over it here and there.

As far as the eye can see, right up to the purple Atlas, stretches the fertile Sahel and the Plain of the Mitidja. Orchard, vineyard, garden, field—the place looks like a deep green gold mine. It is! Look well, and carry the memory with you as you plunge into a shady avenue. That fertile view will have to support you; it will be a very refreshing memory later on.

"One man's meat is another man's poison" runs the old adage; never could it have been better exemplified than by the story of the Algerian vineyard.

That terrible scourge, the Phylloxera, had done its worst with the French vine by about the year 1880 and dealt it a blow from which it has not recovered to this day. Then it was that Algeria, free from this awful pest, took a hand in the game, and began to plant vines. It was probably the best day's work ever done for the colony when the Government decided to push forward the work by all the means in its power. True, the grape lacked many qualities of the Metropolitan variety; it was even behind the Spanish and Italian sort, but—and here came its chance—the vine took to Algerian soil like a duck to water and throve exceedingly (it had always, of course, been cultivated—but not extensively). Here, then, was a method of preventing the Italian and Spanish articles swamping the markets whilst the French grape was doing its best to recover.

Men and money poured into the country to take up the good work. This was the heyday of the colonist—the genuine colonist, as opposed to the official genus. (Alas ! too often is the latter variety but a cross between a functionary and a real estate agent, with the ideas of both and the bank-balance of neither). Brushwood, dwarf, palm, native, alike they rolled back before the legions of Bacchus. He rushed them off their feet, until to-day nearly 200,000 hectares are under his control !

Sweet wines are, it appears, unsuccessful, and even the ordinary variety stood under great disadvantages at first in regard to its fermentation, etc., owing to the long summer and the hot autumn. It was not, in fact, until MM. Lecq and Brame introduced the refrigerator process, that complete reduction of the sugar and consequent perfect fermentation was possible. Now quite excellent wines are being produced.

A considerable business is done in the grape for table purposes, especially in the region of Guyotville. The variety in favour for export is the Chasselas de Fontainebleau. Three weeks or so of 'law' is all that the Algerian grape has upon the markets before it is swamped by the French production, not to speak of those of Italy and Spain. But still the profit is good. In the region of Guyotville it has been suggested that the maturity of the grape might be hastened by artificial means, that another week or fortnight might be gained.

When the grapes are packed the box is turned upside down and filled from the bottom, the finest fruit being put in first. The box is then turned right way up—after the bottom has been nailed on, of course—and the top taken off that the packing of the top layers may be perfected. Women-packers get as much as five francs a day. The commerce in raisins lies more particularly in the hands of the Kabyles.

And now that we have taken our rest we may proceed soberly on our way past farm and villa, and note with what interest the local hind regards the tourist clothed 'à l'Anglais.' Happily we may also remark that this concentration of mind on the unnecessary is balanced by a most equal apathy when he turns to the work on hand; so that on the two counts his brain is not overtaxed, which probably accounts for his preferring the mattock to the spade for breaking up the ground. I fancy it must be less conducive to brain-fag.

Once over the crest of the hill, you sweep down again into a charming little valley which the road to Cheragas crosses. We must be careful not to coast too fast, for there are one or two very sharp turns in the descent and a nasty little bridge at the bottom. In this sheltered spot the market-gardeners are getting on apace. Flowers are well in evidence round about here and all over the Sahel, though more especially at Cheragas and Staouéli. The 'geranium rosat' is much cultivated for its essence, which is used in large quantities as a substitute for the genuine essence of rose. As three crops a year can be obtained, in April, July, and October, that is to say—or perhaps a month later if the season is a bad one—the return, on the whole, is not bad. A good deal is also done in the way of orange blossoms for the scent Néroli. April is the month for this; all the larger blossoms are shaken from the tree on to a sheet on the ground, none but the fully opened flower being taken—as the buds contain but little essence.

With regard to jasmine, the only people who go in for it are the Moors, who grow a little in their gardens, which is a pity. It is such a delightful flower!

Whilst people persisted in grafting on the eglantine no results were obtainable in Algeria with the rose tree; but now that they have turned their attention to the 'indica major' the success has been both rapid and happy. Still, the fact remains that for the flower-battles on the first day of the year roses still have to be imported from the Midi! Perhaps the time will come when the rose will flourish as happily in the land of the burnous as it now does in the valleys of Bulgaria, and the true essence will be distilled to the ousting of the sham. Happy augury for a new country.

We might turn aside outside Cheragas and run on to the Trappist monastery at Staouéli, where the monks at one time did a lucrative little business in the scent and liqueur line, retaining as a most curious motto, "S'il est dur de vivre à la Trappe, qu'il est doux d'y mourir," which goes to prove that things are not always what they seem, and that the girl in the sweet-shop often eats the fewest chocolates.

Perhaps, on the other hand, we remember that the reverend fathers have had to depart, and the place is now run by a Spanish firm on strictly business lines. We do not therefore anticipate the dashing of free drinks on such a generous scale, the mixing of wine spiritual and of the flesh, as it were, to the greater glory of Mother Church and the beatification of the pilgrim. In my own case this turning aside was sternly repressed, and the self-abnegation most justly counted unto me for virtue with an enjoyable celerity, as remarkable as it is infrequent.

I was rewarded by the sight of two most beautiful Arab horses, surmounted by two very fine French gendarmes, armed 'cap-à-pie,' rifle on back and all the rest of it. Whether the horses were the more proud of their riders or the riders of their horses, or whether there was a general admiration founded on mutual esteem, I could not say. But the carriage and bearing were so superb, so superlatively superb that I had to get off my machine and stare; a very rude thing to do, I grant you, but under the circumstances I venture to say perfectly permissible. And, indeed, I was not alone in this, for as I turned to mount my machine I caught the smile on an Arab's face. There was much meaning in that smile. It sent me into a brown study.

Round and about Cheragas and on the way to El-Biar there are a goodly number of fruit trees. It would seem that only the stone fruit takes to African soil in any way; apples and pears are quite out of the running, the fruit being dry and tasteless even in cases where the tree actually does bear. Plum-trees, cherry-trees, peach-trees and so on are fairly fruitful, but of short life.

Of course, the main problem of the vegetable and fruit grower is the question of irrigation. He has to deal with this as best he can by means of the 'noria,' by which the water is raised from the well and poured into the irrigating channels in a more or less continuous stream.

To my mind the noria is picturesque to a degree; it consists of earthenware buckets fastened on to an endless cord or cable of rope. The water is raised by a ratchet-wheel system of wood, and the motive force is given by two long tree-branches thrust through holes in the end of the upright axis. As this is a country where the one thing they do not refuse to women is the right to work, the ladies generally have the honour of manning (?) the capstan, whilst the lord and master looks on with a more or less appreciative eye and puffs away reflectively at his cigarette.

Having left Cheragas behind, we are now on the pretty road to El-Biar, a quarter much patronised by the British Colony and schools. And when we get to that interesting place we may fairly consider ourselves in suburbia again. One goes to El-Biar much as the Londoner ever and anon pays a visit to Hampstead Heath and the Whitestone Pond. The view is excellent, and the cost of the trip from town by tram about the same. Coming home through the Kasbah we descend the terrible Rue de Rovigo, which is steep and like unto the street they call straight in Jerusalem; "about as straight as a corkscrew," is Mark Twain's description. There is nothing more typical of New Algiers than the crowding Babel of the Rue de Rovigo.

We feel a bit tired now, no doubt; the hills have been steep and the roads not over perfect. What is more—the sun is getting hot, so we make up our minds to have a comfortable lunch and loaf about for the rest of the day. We have done somewhere between thirty and forty kilometres, or say about twenty-five miles; not much for the professed scorcher, if you will, but quite a decent morning's work for those of a saner spirit with a penchant for strolling philosophy. It is, moreover, a suggestion of our work to-morrow and for many a long day. Somewhat over thirty miles a day is really quite sufficient if you are desirous of seeing anything besides your cyclometer. It will be well for us to set before us some mild ideal such as this, for to-morrow we take to the road.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE ROAD TO TIZI-OUZOU

THERE is always a lively spirit of adventure in the air when one strikes out into the unknown. On the morning of my departure from Algiers I had a curious feeling come over me; I can only recall once having experienced it before. That was when, in prehistoric times, I travelled by horse 'bus from Hampstead Heath to Streatham, via the 'Elephant.' The prospect was much the same. In the latter case one did some five miles on a knife-board; in the former about five hundred miles over the mountains and unknown roads. As cycling tours go, the mere mileage, of course, was nothing, and for the professed adventurer who laughs at mere discomfort—after he is safely at home again and by his club fireside—the little difficulties to be overcome were a mere bagatelle.

But I am neither a professed cyclist, nor am I a modern Marco Polo; furthermore, I am vastly attached to the little creature comforts that make life worth living. Possibly, later on, much will be put down here to the lack of my morning tea. Fortunately people call me well-looking—not to say fat—at the present moment, and of a cheery countenance;

so it is to be hoped that not much is written in malice.

Otherwise I should complain about the difficulty of fixing my baggage on to the machine, and of the ubiquitousness of my old enemy, Benzarti, who met me at the hotel door, full of curiosity and misinformation. On the contrary I prefer to dwell on the warmth with which mine host bade me adieu, on the cheery smartness of my khaki get-up—nothing flippant, mind you, from my grey felt hat to my neat brown shoes, but everything just so.

I believe, if you will, in the collar-and-tooth-brush principle for the man who travels afar; but let that collar at any rate be a clean one.

Every man arouses interest at some moment in his life; fortunate is he if of sufficient age to be aware of the fact. Such was my good fortune. I am profoundly glad to say that, on that early morning when I slipped quietly out of Algiers by the Menerville road, every man and boy, to say nothing of the girls, turned and stared—but not more than five per cent laughed. Imagine what it would have been in London!

For the first few kilometres, past the Jardin d'Essai and the Champ de Manœuvres, the road is badly paved and dirty; after that, however, one meets decent, if dusty, macadam, interspersed with stretches of 'pavée' when it runs through a village.

From Algiers to Rouiba—the stopping-place for lunch—is some sixteen miles. The road runs past fields of enormous cabbages, and is often shaded by delightful avenues of trees. Soon the little village of Hussein Dey is left behind, and the machine almost runs of its own sweet will as we drop gently down on to the Oued el-Harrach, which is crossed by a bridge not far from the original one built by Ibrahim Ramadan. The old bridge is the finer, and is justly glorified by the inscription 'building marvellous and splendid.'

Up to now we have been running by the sea-shore, through market-gardens mostly cultivated by Mahonnese from the Balearic Isles. They are not a bad-looking race, at any rate as regards the female 'sect.' But you must not look out for the piquant 'retroussé' nose, that little nose so much looked down upon by its Roman sisters, but which nevertheless carries the men before it. No, sirs, the bill of fare to-day consists of pretty oval features that would go excellently well with a gown from Paquin, but would probably be horribly boring over saffron-cake in a golf-club.

Before putting on the town pace into Maison Carrée, just cast your eye over the glorious Cap Matifou in the far distance; Matifou, with its white, straggling line of houses and the ruins of Rasguina, from which has arisen, phœnix-like, old Algiers. Can you wonder that for some reason or other there is an old Arab legend of vast treasures guarded by a genius lying in caverns beneath the ruins of the Cap?

Over the bridge we spin into a purely native village of fair size—Maison Carrée. Here is situated the Monastery of St. Joseph, where the Roman Catholic missionaries are trained for work far away in the 'back of beyond,' in the regions of Nyanza and Timbuctoo.

When on duty they wear the burnous, and in consequence are called the White Fathers; those that one sees about impress one very favourably as a fine body of men for the work. It is said that these men are trained for the work with most consummate skill.

What is it that breeds the missionary spirit? Is it purely regard for the spiritual welfare of a treacherous and bigoted race or—I speak with bated breath—is there sometimes a substratum of less holy kind? Is it possible that some of these men have been born some three hundred years too late? All I can say is, that the eagle glance of more than one face would far better befit hauberk and gorget than the peaceful cowls of the Fathers. Of such stuff were the men made who sailed from La Rochelle to the conquest of Florida.

What a contrast do we find in the conception of the Agricultural College, whose special duty is to study the resources and the possibilities of the steppian regions of the Hauts Plateaux! An arid region of extreme climate. The College itself is placed in one of the most balmy and mild of the valleys of the littoral!

For a few kilometres out of the village a little gentle climbing has to be done. So much the better; we shall want stout calves before we get to our journey's end. Before long, however, we reach the level, and spin along over a plain that even the most kindly thoughts can only call to mind as monotonous.

It is in crossing this plain that at last we get the opportunity of studying the native at leisure. We are really getting into the country now, and rather out of the guide-book's beat.

Not to put too fine a point on it, the native is distinctly dirty; fastidious people would probably call him filthy. His one-time white burnous and his gandoura are more often than not in tatters. Should he be a poor man he uses Hobson's horse; and, stick in hand, covers the ground with a swinging stride that speaks well for the durability of his slippers.

What an energetic man! He must cover miles in a day! Perfectly true—so he does! Perhaps thirty.

I wonder what his object is? He tramps so steadily ahead, looking to neither right nor left. Nothing! Or at most to smoke a pipe of tobacco with a friend!

It is a fact that a little enquiry will easily prove—not from the native, mind you, for he takes as much delight in misleading the foreigner as does a Cornish peasant; but the 'colon' of old standing will affirm that the smaller the objective the more energy will the native expend.

Little donkeys, 'bourricot' by name, are much used by the more well-to-do. Any man possessing a mule is already a man of substance. So tiny are the ‘ bourricots ’ that they are almost hidden by the huge bundles thrown across their backs ; on top of these sacks invariably sits a long-legged individual whose feet could easily touch the ground ; in his hand is a long thick stick with which he leisurely, ‘ but scientifically,’ beats the poor little flea-bitten beast whilst urging it forward with raucous cries.

These animals seem to be an absolute exception to Nature’s rule. As far as the European eye can see there is no such thing as a last straw in the case at all. Imagine a coster going down to the Derby with a well-filled barrow. Himself and ’Liza, his friends and their ’Lizas, their kids, their asses and all that they have, the whole piled on the barrow. Now unyoke the donkey, hoist the barrow on to its back and strap it there. That, my friends, is the familiar and everlasting state of the ‘bourricot.’ The curious thing is that he limps along and does not seem to care twopence!

One little family-party struck me as being particularly charming. It was evidently quarter-day, and the good people were moving on to pastures new.

First came the kine as represented by two anæmic goats, urged on by the herd, a dirty little rascal clothed in his impudence and a ragged shirt which lacked the tail. He was having a roaring time, swaggering before his sisters, who came limping on his heels with bundles as big as themselves. Next came the presumable grandmother—or she might have been an early ‘ flame ’

—with a bundle of wood on her back that would have given Atlas food for thought. The old lady was bent absolutely double, whether by the 'rheumatiz' or an overdose of stick it would be difficult to say. Thirdly, and in order of seniority, two of the gentleman's wives—the latest addition, also the most comely, having the post of honour immediately in advance of her liege lord—the only goods with which she was burdened were the baby and a water-pot. Lastly came four pattering feet surmounted by an enormous pile of sacks and a tent. A closer inspection, as the caravan passed, revealed the fact that this was monsieur himself, and that he had two heads and four feet; that, in fact, there were two of him, and that what I had at first taken for a dog's head was nothing less than the diminutive head of the donkey, which was about the size of a large collie!

Was this the manner in which the Patriarchs were wont to travel?

One pleasant feature about the road is that it is very frequently shaded by delightful avenues of trees.

Almost the whole land is given over to market-gardening in this district. On the littoral between Algiers and Bougie a great quantity of tobacco is grown, which goes to produce that particular form of 'whiff' known as the cigarette Bastos.

Strange to say, asparagus can be cultivated practically all over the country, but most of the vegetable-growing consists in the production of the 'primeurs,' the early fruit! On the coast, products of this kind are some fortnight ahead of those in the South of Europe, and reap a corresponding profit, despite the high freights and the lack of facilities given to the farmer. Unfortunately the steamship companies treat the colonist in this respect almost as badly as some of our railways treat the small farmer over here; and that is saying a good deal. Most of the business is in the hands of the Spanish, the Maltese, and the Italians.

Artichokes of the violet variety are extensively cultivated, but the profits are not nearly what they were some twenty or twenty-five years ago. A good deal is done with the haricot, the planting being so arranged as to bring to perfection the little green shoots—the 'haricot vert'—in either November or December. In either case, unfortunately, there is much to be contended with; for in the first, the last gatherings of the European fields are still on the market; in the second, the crop is very apt to be destroyed by hail and frost. Peas do not do badly, nor do melons. Beets are all right, it appears, where the culture is confined to the edible variety; but little, however, can be said for the sugar-beet. On the whole, market-gardening has a great deal to fight against on the Algerian littoral.

As time goes on and more refined processes are brought into use, the fortnight's advantage that it has over Europe will be steadily, but surely, cut down.

It behoves the local cultivator to come up to the scratch and use artificial methods like his neighbours, instead of relying on legends of climate and tricks of the trade that were no doubt the very latest thing in the days of Carthage but are a bit out of date in these practical times.

Another point strikes one in connection with this business. It would be imagined that by sheer process of elimination carried forward through countless ages, the native would have arrived at the best method of utilising the soil. And, in fact, he has at last got to the pitch of actually making ends meet, as a general rule ; his method is to get as many varieties of vegetables as possible into his little patch.

Is it from a feeling of superiority that the ‘ roumi ’ goes in for monoculture pure and simple these days ? If that is the only reason, the unbeliever is like to be terribly disillusioned. Even now he feels the pinch when it comes to manuring time.

As I have before mentioned, stone fruit seems to be the only variety that stands anything of a chance in the fruit line. Apples and pears and such-like succulent morsels hereabouts are of no such juicy nature as to tempt anything more fastidious than an ostrich. Consequently these fruits, to the value of many thousand francs, are annually imported. Little details like this rather point to one or two errors in some of the puffs which are given to describing Algeria as the original Garden of Eden.

Oranges and lemons seem to do pretty well, the mandarin especially being pushed ahead. I do not remember having eaten a pomegranate since my school days, and rather think, in fact, that I had forgotten their very existence until I ran up against them again in this corner of the world, where they flourish and grow exceeding ripe. Cherries, plums and apricots, the alligator-pear, the guava, the sweet-pod, all these may be seen by the enquiring eye in the orchards of the Tell, and it is pleasant to hear that some profit is being drawn from them; for here, as everywhere, the French are putting into fruit-growing all that 'volonté' with which they habitually tackle a problem.

One admires vastly the pertinacity with which they try every mortal thing that has ever titillated the palate of man. The list of failures can only be characterised as appalling. No hearts but the stoutest could have stuck to it for so long.

Aloe, eucalyptus, our prickly friend the cactus, are all used for hedges. Any desire to unlawfully trespass is incontinently checked by the long, exceedingly business-like spines of the latter plant; it may not perhaps be as picturesque as the hazel; but, believe me, it is far more effective.

I arrived at Rouiba just in time for church-parade; that is to say, the local variety of the same.

I had never come to really close quarters with the native before I ran right into him here. Sunday morning was evidently very much the market-day. The Place was packed tight with particularly odoriferous gentlemen in tattered burnouses of an extremely dirty white. Up and down the main street and its confluents they marched in a solid phalanx gesticulating and cursing roundly.

One man ran the whole way across the square to spit in the face of an enemy. Grand entry of the gendarmes; quelling of the row; vindication of the justice of the conqueror. Excellent! But I fancy there would be a little further discussion in the douars that night, perhaps the flash of a bistouri and a red trickle on the ground.

Strange and inconsequent seemed the homely touches of farmer life when the bronzed colonists and their wives gossiped with their neighbours on the steps of the church. Broadcloth and honest black stuffs held their sway in Rouiba as firmly as in any English village. A friendly glass or two would follow, then up they would climb into the ancestral trap and jog off in immemorial style to some little homestead of the plain.

I descended at the Hotel Glacier, had a rub down and lunch. Mine host was obliging and the food not bad, though, of course, the general arrangement of the place was somewhat primitive.

I was off betimes, as I wanted to get to Menerville in comfort. There is nothing very awful about the distance—some twenty-eight kilometres or so—but the latter part of the journey is a stiff climb, and I am by no means an expert wheeler; twilight, too, is practically non-existent. I must also confess to a certain fetish of romance and highway robbery.

For the first few kilometres the road is delightfully smooth and flat; after that, however, the fun begins. A fine run down of about one in twenty brings one to Reghaia. Merrily one spins over the bridge and on towards L'Alma. If you are old and rash, and want to show what you can do, you rush the heights of Alma in true Crimean style. If you are young and sensible—like myself for instance—you get off and walk! Thereby do you obtain the blessing of a steady breath and a light heart for the charge through Corso. This is where the wisdom of having a little in hand comes in.

From Corso to Menerville much switch-backing has to be done, which is only really enjoyable with a good following wind, even when the roads are good—and I must say that about Corso they are excellent.

Put your pride in your pocket and get off and walk as often as possible—for the scenery if for nothing else. It is picturesque; it is more than that, it is fine. We are traversing the olive forest of Reghaia.

Now the sun is setting; the hills begin to change faster and still more fast. The dæmons of the old world awake. Only their mantles could tinge the hills with such a marvellous blue as the sun sinks to rest behind them.

Fortune would have it that I should get a puncture some few kilometres this side of Menerville; it was, of course, too dark to pretend to look for it, so I made my first acquaintance with the younger branch of the French colonist under the cover of dusk. It was perhaps fortunate! I was in all probability saved many a blush; but I must say that outwardly they extended to me general courtesy that was most welcome, even if the children did regard me as a stray member of Barnum and Bailey's.

Putting up at the Hotel Blanchard I settled myself for the night; attended to the puncture, and then proceeded to enjoy what I was pleased to consider a well-earned meal. As a first day's march I considered thirty-five miles would do quite well. As I explained before, I am not an athlete and take more delight in the pleasures that our civilisation provides than in those dear to the heart of the Patagonian. Probably this will account for my feeling hurt that the hotel should provide no other guest as interesting as myself, with whom I might judiciously converse.

The guide-book says that Menerville is chiefly inhabited by exiles from Alsace-Lorraine. Perhaps so; but for the life of me I could distinguish no detail in which they differed from any other French people of similar class and aspiration.

During the rising of '71, Menerville was practically destroyed by the natives, and there was much throat-cutting. But it has arisen again and now is as prosperous and ordinary a French town as the centre of a well-to-do agricultural district has every right to be. This much I discovered before I turned in.

Napoleon said that victory is ever to the big battalions; a very true remark, one proved up to the hilt, indeed, in the case of Gulliver—not to mention many a frequenter of wayside inns. So before retiring to roost I plentifully besprinkled my couch with oil of lavender. Whether the suspicion was correct or not I shall never know, but I certainly slept the sound sleep of the just and the eminently righteous.

Early astir though I was in the morning, I found that Menerville had already done about half its daily business, and the diligences were filling up for outlying districts and for cross-country runs of every description.

How delightful to spin along in the keen fresh air, full of independence and sheer 'joie de vivre,' instead of being cooped up in a species of hermetically-sealed ramshackle old 'bus, behind four or five sweating horses with their accompaniment of stench and dust.

And the baggage on top! Heavens alive! Whatever keeps such top-hamper from overturning the whole thing at the first corner is surely some kindly thought of Hermes, Protector of Thieves and Travellers; it can by no means be the hand of man.

There is nothing like starting with a well-decided goal before one. So I determined to make Tizi-Ouzou by night, splitting the journey at Camp du Maréchal for lunch.

To all intents and purposes we are now in Kabylia, though we do not actually cross the boundary until we reach the Camp, some thirty kilometres further on.

The road out of Menerville drops gently down to the valley of the Isser as far as Felix Faure, and then runs by the side of the railway to Bordj Menaiel. You traverse a well-cultivated plain dotted with prosperous-looking farm-houses. Every now and then you see clumps of olive and fig trees—or oxen ploughing, or perhaps a goodly number of sturdy beasts throwing themselves into the yoke with irresistible force as they haul a tree-trunk up some steep bank. At Hausonvillier I think it was (the next village before the Camp), I saw seven yoke to one tree. What with the shouting teamsters and the straining cattle the scene was lively indeed. When, with one last terrific heave, they just got it over the crest I could scarce forbear to cheer.

On leaving this village a long run down a steep and winding road brings you on to the Sebaou. Altogether a picturesque run, which makes you quite ready for lunch by the time you reach the turning on the right that leads to Camp du Maréchal.

In general arrangement and up-keep the place resembles nothing so much as a farmyard. But still it is in contact with civilisation and possessed of no less than two steam trams a day. It has more—it has a pub.

THROWING THEMSELVES INTO THE YOKE

I take it that I shall be committing no grave indiscretion if I remark on the bar-parlour as being the apparent club-room for all the Government officials of the neighbourhood. However, I will immediately cover myself by saying that though simple to a degree, the déjeuner I partook of in that little hostel was one of the best I have ever eaten. If it was a pre-arranged club-lunch, I congratulate the Republican Government on its choice of officers.

CHAPTER VII

THE CAPTURE OF FORT NATIONAL

EVEN to the most casual eye it was evident that the days of ease and sloth were over; the white-capped mountains that stretched to the horizon were none other than the mighty Djurdjura, the ramparts of Upper Kabylia that have been the stronghold of the Berbers from time immemorial. The Romans found them impenetrable; how long the French could keep them in case of a rising is a moot question. The gleaming peaks, the deep-cut gloomy ravines, the clinging forests that hang, God knows how, on the precipitous sides, form a fitting home for the rugged mountaineers that hold them.

Armed only with their poniards, in the old days they would hurl themselves bodily on the advancing troops. Over precipice or crag the Kabyle and his victim would roll, his savage teeth biting deep into the roumi's throat. A cheerful people!

Fortunately, in these days, though the Kabyle has all the will to slit a Christian gullet, he is baulked of his desire for the present by the number of troops that watch him day and night.

I felt, therefore, quite easy about my wind-pipe; the same could scarcely be said of my legs. There were one or two little passes of some five thousand feet that had to be tackled; already my muscles tingled. It behoved me, then, to get under way before they turned to water.

A gentle descent to the Oued bou G'doura, followed by a run along the railway side, after which we cross the Oued Defali; and then the climb begins. From the Camp to Tizi-Ouzou there is only one decent bit of coasting the whole way.

Nobody, though, but a confirmed record-breaker would feel in the slightest distressed by this, for now we are beginning to see the Berber 'chez soi.'

Native villages of wattle gourbis are scattered here, there and everywhere; with every now and then, to please the artistic eye, a few low huts of rough, unmortared stone.

We pass microscopic farmyards in an absolutely indescribable state, hedged off from the fields with rough-hewn tree-branches, and mangy dogs lie about and scratch in a very homely way, whilst the rooster gives vent to his feelings in the usual domestic manner.

Small fields and smaller cattle are the order of the day. Oxen are used for practically all draught purposes and to haul the rough old Roman wooden plough through the surface soil; for hereabouts the tillage, after all, is but a gentle scratching.

Far up on the hill-sides we hear the shepherds piping to their flocks in a plaintive old-world way. From time to time we come across a little bare-limbed urchin sitting by the road piping away on a 'qasba,' a sort of reed flute. The tune is but a variation on two or three melancholy notes. It is not unpleasing, and, I suppose, from constant repetition through the last ten thousand years or so the sheep have come to love it ; quite natural, too, if it is permissible to judge by the human parallel.

Red-billed storks wander leisurely about the fields, pickers-up of unconsidered trifles. I felt ashamed of the modernity of my bicycle.

From Mirabeau and Bou Halfa the route is steep and trying to Tizi-Ouzou. On the other hand the constant change and grandeur of the scene are worth a very long day's journey indeed.

I capped the ascent by another puncture. Perhaps that accounts for my not being able to see anything worthy of note in Tizi-Ouzou itself but the pestiferous little boot-blacks that haunt the hotel doors and make the life of the casual tourist an absolute burden to him. They would come creeping slyly into the café, keeping one eye on the door. When at last it got too bad, there would be a hue and cry and a general battue ; and then peace again for a short while.

Besides the garrison of a regiment of tirailleurs, there are about a couple of thousand Europeans in the place, which is the capital of Upper Kabylia. There is also a large native population ; but, as the

French and native quarters are kept quite separate, the former is little more than a village despite its cathedral, mairie, and mosque. It is pleasantly provided with shady trees, several cafés, and plenty of shops. Notwithstanding these multitudinous attractions I was glad to get away on the road to Fort National.

Running down into the valley of the Sebaou, it was very nice to continue by the side of a pretty stream in the shade of gracious trees. A curious feature of the river is the vast size of the gravel bed compared with the insignificant little river trickling down the centre.

I passed several gipsy-like encampments of wandering Kabyles with their patriarchal tents. Women begin to wear their more natural striped costume, which is little more than a coloured cloth wound tightly round them and fastened at the waist with a girdle. Nearly all seem to carry a tattoo mark, a line running from lower lip to chin. Has it anything to do with the sacred symbol of the Phœnician goddess Tanit ? Her sign is largely to be seen, I believe, in Tunisia, both as a tattoo mark and on pottery ; somewhat conventionalised, of course, after so many years' pure tradition, but really surprising in its persistence after two thousand years of alien religion. Though in honest truth the Kabyle has not absorbed quite so many of Mahomet's maxims as the followers of the Prophet would like to believe. For one thing, the

Kabyle woman declines to veil herself! It is the old, old story that old blood can do what young blood can't.

From the tenth kilometre stone the steep ascent to Fort National begins, and it continues to the twenty-eighth without a break.

The gradient is one in ten and, I tell you, you know it by the time you get to the top. All vehicles find the work heavy; five horses and even seven are quite common as teams.

For part of the journey I was in luck's way, for I managed to get one or two natives to help me up a few short cuts. These 'traverses' are really gullies worn by the winter torrents, and largely used by the natives as paths. They are very stony and steep, but you can sometimes cut off a mile.

Whilst taking one of my numerous well-earned rests and lazily scanning the green patchwork below and the winding road far down, I held converse with two little rapscallions mounted on a donkey. They were clothed merely in little short shirts and bronze. The flow of language was somewhat dammed at first by my lack of knowledge of Arabic; however, I pulled out my dictionary of that simple language and addressed the elder. I talked for a few minutes, quite naturally failing to make him understand a single word of what I was saying. So I turned to the other end of the precious book and started again. Same result! I was just wondering if I should try the middle or give it up in despair, when dirty-face number two struck in.

"Si, mon frere, il est fou. Il ne comprend pas le Français ; moi, je le sais bien."

I closed up the Arabic treatise hastily and put it in my pocket.

We got on all right after that until a big bad brother with a roguish eye came strolling by. Seeing profit to be made out of the infidel, he cuffed both kids out of the way and insisted on showing me a short cut. So up we went.

About midday it seemed to me good to partake of lunch. I have great faith in the traveller's luck, and delight in leaving these small things to hazard; though, emulating the man of peace who used to have a morsel of lead-piping in his pocket in case of emergency, I always carried a piece of chocolate and a spot of cognac wherewith to triumph over nature. On this occasion I enquired of my friend the situation of the nearest hotel, restaurant, café, or other place of refreshment.

"Il n'y a que le boulanger à Zamazirt," replied he. "Thou canst of him buy bread ; that is, if he be not in the fields with his oxen ! "

"And how far off is this baker of bread ? " I demanded, as a sort of sinking feeling came over me.

"A cinq kilometres," he replied, with a cheerful smile.

At this moment a gentleman descended upon us from goodness knows where, clad in a most superior cycling costume and a fez. Politely dismounting, he entered into conversation, only to confirm the dread that lingered in my bosom. The potential baker had shut up shop and gone to market some twenty miles off, he believed.

And it was so.

When we did reach the baker's shop I found it situated on the edge of a precipice some couple of hundred feet deep, over which I sat dangling my legs whilst runners were despatched in various directions to see if the local magnate was within reach.

As I puffed away at my pipe I had leisure and to spare in which to admire the incomparable view on the other side of the ravine.

Jutting crags that stood boldly out from the steep hillside, like dormer windows on an old moss-covered roof; the clinging forest slipping right down to the mountain's foot, or gently spreading over a smooth-limbed spur, like a blanket over a sleeper's knee. Here and there a peak leapt up into the snow-line and above; all else was a soft dark green, save where a red-roofed Kabyle village, perched on some inaccessible niche high up on the mountain side, picked out the restful background with a vivid spot of colour. I have neither seen nor dreamt of anything like it before.

Not far from where I was sitting there was a native school; it was the hour of the midday meal. So after the children and the young men had thoroughly taken stock of me and my machine, they grouped themselves behind me in ranks and crooned over their afternoon lessons. Not a girl amongst them, of course; a native's ideas on female education are as yet of the primitive order.

The teacher, a fine upstanding fellow in burnous, with the eye of a hawk, leant against the gate and lazily smoked cigarette after cigarette. Poor fellow, he looked a bit out of place. Now at the head of a whirlwind charge—!

As the baker had very evidently gone off for the day there was but little to be obtained by sitting and swearing, so off I set again up the winding road. My mental progress soon began to resemble that of Mr. Bunyan. I followed the Pilgrim through every shade of possible feeling, and found them all bad. With what joy did I see the interminable march approach its end, as Fort National at last came into view round a bend of the road.

Built right in the heart of the territory of the warlike Beni-Paten, the fortress is perched on the crest of the hill and is practically but a village and citadel surrounded by bastioned walls, much as Pevensey Castle must have been in the old days. Marshal Randon's soldiers made the road to it from Tizi-Ouzou in three weeks; a climb of well over 2000 feet in twelve miles!

It so happened that a mist was settling down on the hill crests when I reached my goal. The surrounding hills and valleys were absolutely masked ; it was with difficulty that one could see a hundred yards ahead.

The morning had been well spent ; but with a mist such as was falling at the time, little appeared to be possible in the afternoon. After cudgelling my brains as to what to do, I was really so tired that I felt inclined to wait on Fortune. Happily I did so.

Feeling fatigued both mentally and physically, it was with most intense relief that I sat down to a late déjeuner at the Hotel des Touristes.

After lunch it was only to be expected that I should take a much brighter view of things, and it seemed a very real pity to spend more time than necessary indoors. Like the hardened campaigner that I was becoming, I first of all gave my trusty machine a thorough clean up, oiled sundry portions of its weird and wonderful mechanism and, in short, turned it out like a new pin.

To have stuck together throughout all that arduous climb to Fort National had indeed created a bond of sympathy between us that, I am glad to say, no fractiousness on either the one side or the other has since been able to sever. From that day I christened my faithful companion the "Pug," and so, indulgent reader, with or without your kind permission, I purpose to call him here.

For the first time we shared the same bedroom. Where fingers are light and hearts are heavy with fear

THE DJURDJURA GATE

of the tax-collector, it was perhaps not an unwise proceeding.

Pondering upon these things and their like I went forth into the mist, strolling along the main street, where one finds what few shops there are, as far as the Djurdjura Gate. You must know that Fort National possesses two of these luxuries, the one just mentioned and the other at the opposite end of the village. As the village is but a fortress, its gates are closed at nine o'clock sharp, no natives being allowed either in or out after that hour; though the same rule does not apply to Europeans. In the case of these latter the military are excepted; no 'militaire' is permitted to leave the town after five without a permit. Along Main Street everywhere was a mist as thick as wet cotton-wool. It seemed to me that in default of view there was nothing to be done but to interview the sentry with regard to seeing over the citadel. Advice was tendered me on all sides in gratuitous fashion by needy native boys. Exercising great self-control and considerable command of language, I shook them off all but one, the hotel boot-black (you will find your trip largely governed by these gentry in Algeria, so it is advisable to take a firm line with them from the start). Clung to by this burr, I marched up to the sentry and politely preferred my request for information. He summoned the corporal of the guard.

A vision of red and blue sprang from nowhere. If you have never seen a Zouave salute—with one eye on the main chance—you have missed the sight of a lifetime. Never have I seen so superb a sweep of the saluting hand; never have I seen it cut away so smartly.

My fate was sealed and, thank Heaven, I am man enough to confess it. I surrendered to the baggy breeches and red-embroidered jacket.

He was a little man, as handsome as a Greek god; his eye was the eye of a Barbary pirate; he listened to the tale of my desires with more even than the courteous interest of a London bobby.

Monsieur would conceive of his infinite regret that he was on guard, he replied. At five o'clock, however, it would give him an infinite pleasure to place himself at monsieur's disposal—if desired—for at that hour his duties for the day towards la Belle France were terminated.

Nothing but an expression of concern for my future was expressed in his face. I am bound to say that his companions backed him up so well that no trace of guffaw could be heard from the guard-room as I gave way before the inevitable.

There was but one little detail, he went on, that needed attention, and that was the necessity of getting a pass from the commandant before seeing the citadel. I had better take the ragamuffin at my side to guide me.

Thus was I delivered bound into the very hands I thought to escape; a storm-cloud of disaster seemed already to darken the horizon.

Fortunately for us the mist lifted somewhat, and it was possible, in consequence, to traverse the labyrinth of by-ways and stairways that go to form the general plan of the place without more danger than, say, you would have in crossing at the Bank in the same state of weather.

In the natural course of events the commandant was out. His orderly, still a Zouave, was apologetic and tactful. Call again and mind the step!

Never was there a truer saying by Shakespeare or any of our greater modern poets than that which concerns the likeness of a man to his master. I ought to have mentioned that it was necessary to call at the commandant's private house. When next I crossed the threshold, which, by the way, would have done credit to the fussiest old 'vrouw' that ever holystoned peace and quiet from the side of the Zuyder Zee, I was ushered into the presence of a tall grey-haired gentleman in mufti. He had a grand refinement of manner and looked rather tired, looked as if, in fact, he had waited long for the promotion that did not come. They say there are many such in the French Army. He gave me the pass and chatted pleasantly for some few minutes about nothing, as one does under the circumstances; then he saw me personally to the door. A really charming man!

Returning to the Djurdjura Gate I met my corporal on the prowl. I fear he had a lingering suspicion that perhaps it was unwise to deliver the unshorn lamb into the hands of a Berber for even a few minutes.

Amongst all the inhabitants from the Atlas to Lake Chad the Berber is chiefly noted for his skill in getting blood out of a stone. I quickly reassured my 'caporal' and his face brightened considerably.

My cicerone got rid of the boy without more ado in a 'get-long-there' style that moved me to envy of the baser sort.

"It has to be done," said he. "Fortunately they know us Zouaves of old. Personally," he added, in answer to a query, throwing back his cape with a free and easy air, "personally I consider myself and bayonet equal to any four or five natives." Considering the history of the French Army in Algiers, I can quite understand his feeling.

We just had time to see over the barracks before dark. At least I call it seeing over the barracks, though in truth all I was allowed to see could equally well have been inspected from the yard gate. One barracks is very like another. In fact I was far more interested in my guide's delicate handling of the situation than in anything else! As the regulations have to be fulfilled in all things, of necessity we had to interview the N.C.O. on duty. He graciously remarked that it would give him infinite pleasure to accompany me over the place.

"Tu permets que je t'accompagne ?" asked my captor, with exactly the look of a child of four conducting its granny to the sweetstuff shop. Not for anything would he let the 'poire' out of his sight for even a moment. One good turn deserves another, and so the permission was granted. As I said before, we saw nothing but grey walls, bare yards, and inaccessible windows. Even a reference to the view was impossible because of the high ramparts. Still I am bound to say that there was a flicker of interest in the sergeant's eye as he pouched his well-earned tip. I would have liked to talk a little with him on the strength of it, but was hurried off to the next operation—with much the same feelings, I should imagine, as a hog in a Chicago packing-house.

Thoroughness and duty have ever been the watchwords of the French Army ; my guide was deficient in his regard for neither the one nor the other. At the same time, he was an agreeable rattle as he marched me up this street and down that, pointing out the houses of the local celebrities and their unofficial dwellings with all that passed therein. Either the inhabitants of Fort National live very much *coram populo*, or my mentor was taking the opportunity of exercising his imagination. The gentle reader must judge. I can only add that he had previously been social sleuth-hound of a Marseilles daily.

We must have walked quite three miles, getting all the while more and more sodden with drippings from the trees and the mist before we returned to the hotel and an 'apéritif.'

I quite enjoyed the fellow's company. He was witty in his talk, he was clever and intelligent—virtues which by no means always run together. The conversation turned on military matters from time to time.

"Service hard?" said I.

"Oh no, you see we do half our time in the country like this, and half at Algiers, or some other big town. It gets very slow up here, but the air is splendid; whilst the food—fair in quantity and quality. Take lunch, for instance; we have two really good dishes. Du reste, par ici on se passe d'un Paillard, hein?"

"I take it, you keep the native battalions separate from the European?"

"Certainly."

"What sort of a soldier does the indigéne make?" I asked. There is such a lot of chatter going about concerning our own troops in India that I felt interested. "What sort of a non-commissioned officer does he make? What sort of an officer?"

"Now you have touched a question that interests me considerably," he replied. "Under the new law, the native conscript is drawn by lot. He serves three years with the colours and seven with the reserve. At the time of joining he receives a present of two hundred and fifty francs 'à porter le bat et à manger le pain.'" For that is how the native describes the military service. On the other hand, it really takes eight years to make a good soldier of the Arab or the Kabyle. A drawback, and not the only one.

"When his term of service expires, if he has not received promotion, he leaves his regiment as a confirmed rebel, and fit for any mischief. But supposing now he does get his step, he assuredly expects the Government to find him work on leaving, and that is where the difficulty comes in. The ‘ gradé ’ has lost touch with his co-religionists. They no longer look upon him with the same friendly eye ; he has truly accepted service under the foreigner.

“ The Askri—the regular—has always been looked down upon, even when in the pay of a prince of the true faith. How much more so, then, under a Christian flag. Obviously, as a go-between the native non-commissioned officer loses much of his usefulness.

“ With the commissioned officer the case is even more marked.”

“ You do not altogether surprise me,” I replied.

In the nature of things it must be so. In Alsace-Lorraine the Frenchman who takes service with the German Government is looked upon with no friendly eye by his compatriots.

Putting aside the wise saws and sayings of the long-winded tub-thumpers who have axes to grind, how could one expect the opposite where the difference of race religion and general outlook is so utterly out of sympathy. Fifty years cannot reverse the teaching of five thousand. Are we not finding the same to our own cost in India ?

“ Another point—since it interests you. Take the native commissioned officer. I daresay at Algiers and elsewhere you may have noticed how smart and dapper he is."

I nodded.

"Are you aware," the Zouave went on, "that when that man leaves the army he returns to the paternal gourbi and sleeps on the bare ground? That he dons the tattered burnous again and revels in the squalor?"

"Wheugh!"

"C'est bien vrai, quand même! . . ."

At this moment there was a general exodus from the café into the salle-à-manger, so with a natural politeness the Zouave slung on his capote and excused himself.

"Come in after dinner for a chat and a glass."

If monsieur would excuse him, the day had been very tiring. He had also his 'copains' to consider. Now of the infinitely hospitable offer of monsieur he could not unfortunately avail himself. But it would give him great pleasure to drink his health later in the evening. A litre of wine was a favourite drink between friends.

I smiled; a coin changed hands. My late companion disappeared in the dark, and I entered the dining-room pondering many things.

THE CAPTAIN FOLLOWING BEHIND ON HIS WHITE CHARGER

ALONG MAIN STREET

CHAPTER VIII

THE HEIGHTS OF THE DJURDJURA

VERY early in the morning I was awakened by the tramp of marching feet. It was about six o'clock or maybe half-past five—perhaps even earlier; my friend and his battalion were off in fatigue kit to do a little hill-climbing. They swung out through the gate at a great rate, the captain following behind on his white charger. " Aha ! " thought I to myself, " my friends, you'll come back at a different pace when next I see you ! "

Profiting by such a good example, I turned in and had another sound sleep. In fact, I was not on the road myself until about seven-thirty, with every intention of getting to Michelet and back before lunch ! I wanted to see those Zouaves come back.

As it was a question of twenty kilometres each way and a climb, altogether, of five hundred feet or so, it behoved me to move ahead. My time was further curtailed by the stop rendered necessary in order to take stock of the market held just outside the Djurdjura Gate.

Hucksters' stalls were there, tents in great number, with all the goods spread out on the ground, all the produce of the vast Djurdjura Mountains and of the surrounding plains—nay, taking toll even of Oldham and the looms of Lancashire. Every mortal thing you could imagine seemed to have been brought to market, and round them bargained the dusty crowd with that unending Oriental patience that so belies the vigorous gesture and high-sounding staccato phrase.

By groups were tethered the mules and asses, with the occasional horse of the man of wealth. Without exception they were galled with open sores in almost every imaginable place. They took their rest with the fatalistic indifference of their masters. Perhaps long continuance of suffering produces a dulling of the pain centres; let us hope so. I felt particularly sorry for one little moke. He was so very much alone and so very dejected. To show my sympathy I photographed him.

Once past the crowd, the run to Michelet is very good as regards the road, but distinctly ticklish when it comes to the turnings.

Innumerable natives were trudging behind their oxen, their asses, their sheep, and their goats. Some were wealthy and had mules, which they religiously bestrode on top of their heavy baggage. The usual signs of opulence were apparently stirrups and an umbrella!

As one got further from the town the ladies were more in evidence, with their striped clinging dresses

HE WAS SO VERY MUCH ALONE

and their numerous bangles; some were not unhandsome. From time to time I would pass a whole line of them swinging along in single file, each with a jar on her head, probably containing olive oil. I fancy the poise of the jar induced the peculiarly upright and graceful carriage with which they moved.

Legions of boys passed in charge of flocks, varying in number from quite a respectable flock of sheep to one decrepit old ewe that most probably represented her owner's last claim to consideration as a man of property. The boys seem to have quite a different set of calls from our shepherds. Right away in the hills you would hear them pipe from time to time, and very plaintive it sounded in the far distance.

On leaving the Fort I ran into a cloud; but once emerging, the view was indeed superb. Dozens of Kabyle villages, perched right up in the clouds as it were, marvellous in their clear-cut detail. In and out the road wound, following every slight contour of the precipitous mountain side. Just before you get to Michelet the road crosses a ridge of rock where you look right down into a deep valley on either side. It reminded one of nothing so much as the picture of Mahomet's path to Paradise, which lies along the edge of a razor-blade. A fine place to negotiate on a runaway car!

Michelet in itself has nothing to recommend it; though I believe that every Friday the Beni-Menguellet tribe holds its market there. As, however, I am neither a member of that tribe, nor was I there on a Friday, such a detail failed to interest me. I did not visit the monument to the soldiers who fell in the campaign of 1857 and the insurrection of '71. I felt that they would sleep none the less peacefully because there was one fewer globe-trotter tourist making inane remarks about them that he had cribbed from his guide-book.

Good coasting is indeed a delight of the gods even in these days of safeties. So after I had sampled the view and the lunch at the hotel and scattered a halfpenny or two amongst the bare-legged urchins that tried to race the "Pug," I turned my back to the keen wind and set out for home.

There was a nip to that wind; before I had gone two hundred yards I found the necessity of donning my cape. Even the natives were pretty well muffled up; the temperature cannot have been much above freezing.

About half-way home I passed one of the most curious houses of refreshment I have ever seen —nothing more nor less than an itinerant native café. The whole place of refreshment consisted of a deep hole cut in the earth that banked the road; in this niche were installed a brazier and a huge coffee-urn, over which presided a patriarch. Passers-by would halt on 'bourricot' or sorry mule; up would dash one of mine host's most numerous family with a cup of coffee; a small coin would change hands and off would amble the cavalier.

Although many natives kept to the main road, yet the majority struck off on to paths where you would scarcely think a goat could find a footing. Call and answering call echoed across the valley. They scarcely paid any attention to me, except when politely rounding up their sheep that I might pass.

By the time I got back to the Fort most of the hucksters had gathered together their belongings and departed, but my lonely donkey was still at his post. Main Street, however, was so full of the 'great unwashed' that I was glad to turn into the hotel and have a little lunch. Just as I had finished my coffee and proceeded outside to light a cigarette, lo and behold! the 5th Battalion of the 1st Zouaves appeared in the gateway. I hurried down to see what my friend of the previous evening looked like.

Talk about the town pace—egad! they put it on with a vengeance 'pro bono publico'! "Doucement, mes enfants, doucement!" cried the sergeant with the leading file. Certainly they looked a bit tired, yet there was a set enthusiasm about the face, a lissom spring in the marching that spoke volumes. They looked what more than one affair has proved them—some of the most dashing fighters in the world. My friend and I spotted each other at the same instant—he smiled hopefully.

From time to time the Kabyle is endowed by the

Prophet with an astounding cheek, such as will assail a fourth-form boy on Speech Day. One particular instance came under my notice that afternoon.

Though the village was crowded with natives and there were several police about, yet a man whom I took to be a minor sheikh came gaily riding along with a gun slung over his saddle-bow. Now, no native is allowed to carry arms without a special licence; the gun, indeed, has to be stamped with the owner's name on the stock. So, when I saw a couple of gendarmes walk up to the man, I waited to see what was going to happen.

First of all, the man tried to ride by as if he was not aware of the guardians of the law. A peremptory order brought him to his senses. Then followed a lengthy argument and feigned ignorance as the gun was examined. All to no purpose; the desired mark was not to be found. One of the gendarmes quietly slipped it under his arm.

"You can come and explain yourself at the commissariat to-morrow, if you think it wise," was the only remark he made.

Each passed on his way and the incident closed. The little affair, however, was instructive in its own way.

In the afternoon the atmosphere cleared up to such an extent that I was able to enjoy the splendid view of the great Djurdjura range with its massed blues crowned by stately snow-caps.

Perhaps an hour or so before the dinner, when the short twilight was drawing near its end, I strolled out through the Algiers gate. Suddenly I saw a figure down the road that I most certainly recognised. With it were associated several other figures, of whom I understood the significance. I turned on my heel; as I did, so did they. I pressed the pace, not exactly running, mind you, but walking smartly! Useless! Within a very few moments I heard a soft swift tread behind me; then I remembered the old saying that none but the Connaught Rangers can outmarch the Zouaves. Giving up the race, I stopped to light a cigarette. Arm in arm the four gallants appeared at my side. Ah! How I knew the face, the sidelong glance of infinite wisdom, of the nearest.

"Comment ça va!" said I, taking the bull by the horns.

"Et vous? Monsieur? May I have the infinite pleasure of introducing to you the friends who delighted in drinking your health last night!"

The braided jackets saluted and we shook hands. The eldest spoke.

"Monsieur will perhaps confer on us the honour of his company over an apéritif, seeing that in all probability monsieur has not yet dined." Recognising the inevitable, I thanked him heartily as the ranks closed round me.

It appeared to be pay day, so the waiter at the café smiled upon us. All gave the assurance of an interesting evening. Tongues soon loosened and began to wag merrily. All of them were nice fellows. The eldest was the son of a wine-grower in Mâcon, I think; the youngest, a 'rentier' with all the makings in him of the perfect man-about-town. He was a pretty boy and a gifted talker—at least we will put it that way.

The waiter from long experience knew how to time his visit. It was my turn, and a second drink under the circumstances of course leads to a cigar.

"Thou rememberest, mon vieux," said the boulevardier-in-embryo to my captor, "that last little affair au Maroc ?"

"Ah ! la, la ! Sapristi . . ." Puff—puff.

"Imagine, monsieur, that we were a hundred and fifty, surrounded by a thousand Arabs. But, ma foi, are we not Zouaves ? Le capitaine ordered us to fight our way to the top of a little hill and hold it. That was our only chance until assistance came. 'Une affaire, vous savez !'" The heads nodded in silent memory. "And the capitaine, un brave—mais—. The Arabs are afraid of us and the Germans too. Ils ont peur de nous !" Not being a German, I agreed with fervour and called for more drinks. We drank the health of the 'Entente Cordiale.' My friend insisted on standing a round. I called for more cigars.

I cannot quite remember whether we decided on attacking Germany this year or next, but I know the decision was reached amidst tumultuous applause. The waiter drew near. He was bought off in the usual manner. Again he approached and again he was bought off, the third time he would take no denial.

Might he remind monsieur "that the fowl had already been waiting over half an hour." Such news was a thunderbolt. The Zouaves regarded me with consternation. With profuse apologies they arose, thanking me for the charm of my company.

"Ah," said my friend, as he turned to shake hands, "I see there is one cigar left in the box; may I have the pleasure of smoking it in memory of monsieur?"

As the last figure vanished into the night, I furtively eyed the mountains of soucoupes and then the waiter's face. It was quite blank. I slipped silently into the dining-room.

I had had the honour of hobnobbing with the 1st Zouaves—and it was worth it.

A night's rest confirmed my conclusion that Fort National was too sophisticated for me, that I would do well to be on the road again; so instead of visiting the fastnesses of the Benni Yenni, a tribe near by noted for its skill in the manufacture of pottery and silver ware, I got up early, had my usual breakfast of two raw eggs washed down by a mouthful of cognac, then set off on the long zig-zag down to the valley of the Sebaou. Feeling a natural distaste for the same road as the one by which I came, I took a short cut which would bring me out at Azazga without striking the main road from Tizi-Ouzou.

It was something like riding down the side of a house, with a few very sharp turns that made it a little more interesting. In the fresh morning air that set the blood tingling as I charged down on the peaceful travellers, I felt like an Apache on the warpath, and yelled accordingly; one eye on the road and one on the wonderful scenery opposite; the massive clear-cut mountains, the vast precipices, the bare crags on every side. Trees and rock go to the likening of a patchwork quilt in olive-green and orange picked out with dots of red, where the little native villages are perched high up on the hill-side or, more frequently, right on top of a knoll.

Throughout the greater part of Kabylia the steep escarpments lend themselves to but patchy cultivation, and not over much of it at that; consequently the whole affair is in the hands of the natives. In their way they have done the best that they can in the matter. Something is done in the way of vineyards, something in orangeries, where the mandarin is cultivated, but the olive and fig are the chief sources of revenue. Unhappily, Western science has stepped in to rob the native of half his profits in just the same way that Western diplomacy steps in to rob him of all his territory. In the old days the returns for crude olive oil were worth sixty francs the hectolitre; but now, alas, that is dropping sadly, thanks to the importunate competition of the oils of colza and of cotton. All the same, there are some six millions of olive-trees in Algeria which give a turnover of some nine million francs per annum; so that, obviously, this is one of the great riches of the native. As regards variety, it seems that Fenaya and Cemallal are the favourites. Some of the trees reach a stature absolutely gigantic. Perhaps here, without undue prolixity, I may say a word as regards the actual growing of this most delectable of 'hors d'œuvres.' You must look upon it as a breather some half-way down the slope from Fort National.

An economical method of multiplication much used in Kabylia is the transplantation of the adolescent wild olive, with subsequent grafting. Unlike those of Provence, the trees do not grow on terraces, but are allowed to follow their pleasure on the slopes of the Aurès. But first the tree gets two years in forcing-ground after being grafted, the transplanting being effected at the end of winter.

Certainly one of the most important of all details in its culture lies in the pruning of the branches, which is done three times. The primary cutting takes place when the plant has had three or four years of the forcing-house; the second takes place when the plant is fairly well grown; the third year's cutting has for its object the strengthening of the side-branches. As it is the branch of two years' growth which bears fruit, and that only once, it can be well understood that all means are taken to increase to the utmost the number of these shoots.

Next in order of importance, still on the upward scale, comes the fig. It is to this fruit alone that is due the comparatively dense population of the neighbourhood of Fort National and the Djurdjura, 1·5 souls per hectare, as opposed to the 1 per two or three hectares that is prevalent in the other parts of Barbary. Oil and dried figs with 'galette' being the staple items of diet, it is scarcely to be wondered at that there are some thirty varieties of fig to be found in Algeria. Five years is generally given as the age at which the tree begins to bear fruit, and it reaches the height of its fertility at twenty. Multiplication is chiefly arrived at by planting the shoots of the mature tree. To produce a really edible fruit the cultivator suspends some wild figs amongst the fruit of the cultivated female tree, for though the wild fig itself is inedible to us, yet it is blessed with a very active worm. This little wanderer soon deserts the wild friend of his youth for female society and introduces the necessary pollen. So at least says our old friend Ibn-el-Awam.

After this little dissertation on the culture of the fig, I am perfectly certain, should you have got so far, that you will be more than happy to get awheel again, especially as conversation with the natives of this part is more than difficult, very little French indeed being understood; though the Kabyle is quite polite hereabouts, if somewhat curious.

The boys look bright and sharp and the young girls are quite pretty. Not one amongst them but is picturesque as she sports her bright-striped gown and gay waistband, not forgetting the gaudy handkerchief that binds her black hair. Silver bracelets and earrings are quite common, the latter on occasion being of enormous size.

All women are tattooed on the forehead or have a double line running from the lower lip to the apex of the chin, which to European eyes is not particularly beautiful. It is indeed pretty to see them walking gracefully in the usual file, each crowned with a water-pot. Some will sit by fountain or by well, sorting out the herbs they have gathered in the fields. There is from time to time the glance of a flashing eye, and a friendly wave of the hand for a stranger—*sub rosa*, of course—for in general the master does not approve of such little mannerisms ; indeed, he has been known to try the cooling effect of a little cold steel on his wayward lady.

As a man you would hardly call the Kabyle variety of the lord of creation the very epitome of energy ; his chief form of labour seems to consist in driving his wives and his mules, whilst he smokes and chatters. Even in the fields he always follows a very small piece of work by a very long rest. At least, such was the impression I received in the valley of the Sebaou, as I spun past Freha, in fact throughout the Tell, as the fertile belt is called.

But stay, there is one department where the Berber does shine—shine exceeding well. He has but few equals as bagman or back-door tout. For endless generations it has been his trade, now he is well-nigh perfect in it. As a rule he does not speak Arabic over well; but he speaks it quite well enough to wheedle the less guileful daughters of the desert into unheard-of expenditure over useless trifles, when the ruler of the gourbi is absent.

Small business also delights him in every way. Witness the almost infinite division of property that takes place when the heirs share the spoil. To such a refinement is the affair carried that it is no uncommon thing for a man to be the *owner of a single branch of a tree* or even of *part* of that branch! This is partly due to legal complication; partly to a love of arbitration, almost equal to our own, which is one of the most salient features of the race.

Extremely 'downy' in tortuous Oriental ways, he loves a lie for its own sake, and a compromise that he has no right to. In the first case he tricks his opponent's intelligence, in the second he robs him of his just dues. He does both with an equal joy. For his neighbour he hates with a passion far greater than his love for woman, and that is saying a very great deal.

Many people believe the Berber to be a near relation of those other very old inhabitants of the Mediterranean basin, the Corsican, the Andalusian, and the Sicilian. There is a pronounced trait that seems to bring them very near together. I speak of the 'vendetta.'

People who ought to know say that the family feud is carried to inordinate lengths by the Berber. In some tribes no money payment can wipe out blood-guilt. The weaker family has no hope; it is by no means uncommon, indeed, for the last member of a dying clan to leave his ancestral hearth and fly to the hills in sheer despair—to 'take to the heather' as the Highland phrase used to run.

These are thoughts to while away the time during the somewhat uninteresting run down the valley of the Sebaou. But the sharp climb into Azazga soon brings one to reason.

Déjeuner at the Hotel Gabhardt had that excellent sauce hunger to recommend it; though, anyway, the cooking was far from bad and the company polite and pleasant.

Azazga struck me much as a town that has seen or is going to see better days. All these centres of colonisation have a down-at-heel air of the broken plaster-and-rusty-hinge variety; it is due, no doubt, to a disregard for the non-essential, which everyone who has to struggle hard for his livelihood on virgin soil must sooner or later attain. It is precisely that very liking for the nothings that make the more effete civilisations worth the while. Whoever, in reality, found a yokel with a capacity for appreciating the beauties of the country-side until some worn-out townsman pointed out the sweeping outline of the distant hills or the restful peace of the glassy stream?

I hope that you are somewhat steeped in the pleasures of the older world, for then I can be truly sure that you will appreciate the scent of the woods that we are now about to traverse.

From Azazga to Yacouren is only eleven kilometres or so; but eleven of the best; uphill practically all the way, so that you probably walk and do not ride. More power to your legs and more joy in scented air!

Round the shoulder of the spur winds the road. Down the steep hill-side, from far, far up in the forest, come tumbling frequent cascades of the sweetest ice-cold water. Over mossy beds and shingle they tear, splashing down through the dense wood of chestnut, birch, and cork tree. From time to time you hear the ring of the woodman's axe and sniff the pungent smoke that curls from that best of all fires, the embers of the woodcutter's fire.

It reminds one vastly of the camp fire in Canadian backwoods, where you select the finest tree in the neighbourhood for a victim, hew it down, set to work with tinder-leaves and dead wood under its lea, then sit down to clean your rifle whilst your companion fries the duck or moose-meat as the case may be. Oh! the glorious blaze of the logs as you sit round after tea, sucking away at a battered old briar and swapping lies with the casual stranger who may pass. Then you heap up the blaze with logs, curl up in your blanket and doze off as you watch the dancing Northern Lights, with a final prayer that no damned skunk or other four-footed wanderer will come and sit on your chest when the fire dies down. There are no skunks in the Forest of Yacouren, but there are potential panthers, and folks talk of an occasional hyæna, whilst the wild-boar is an ever-present joy.

Nothing is so good as sleeping in the open if you cannot get a roof, but in this case there was a roof near by ; so I denied myself the pleasure of a camp fire all on my own. Dusk was falling when I jumped off my machine at the door of Yacouren's one and only inn.

Primitive inns I have met in my time, but I really thought that the one I proceeded to honour with my presence would take a lot of beating. Such at any rate was my first impression. When I interviewed the patronne I thanked the god of travellers. For it came out that she was a woman of discernment, not to say push.

" From time to time, monsieur," said she, " one gets pensionnaires in spring, in summer always. There are some who come from Algiers even. Monsieur will then understand the desirability of chambers of the most comfortable. Permit that I show them." Once bitten twice shy, by this time I knew what to expect, yet circumstances were too much for me, and I followed in her wake.

Judge of my surprise when I was marched into a little outbuilding of excessive propriety and cleanliness. If I remember rightly, it had but two rooms, yet they were well cared for, and most natty in their appearance. This was indeed good fortune, so I lost no time in shaking down.

"Monsieur, il faut bien fermer les verrous en sortant. Tout le monde est larron." Presumably she referred to the natives, for I believe the only other residents beside her family were a couple of gendarmes and the schoolmaster. But a nod is as good as a wink to a blind horse; so keenly did I listen for the sound of stealthy fingers that I am sure my ears grew in length by at least half an inch that night.

CHAPTER IX

A NARROW ESCAPE

IN the dining-room of the inn itself, which was at the same time bar-parlour and dog-kennel, I discovered a reverend old gentleman of about ninety, seated before the fire. He saluted me gravely.

" Monsieur will excuse my rising, I have no longer the limbs that I had at the Crimea."

" Oho ! " thinks I to myself, " good father, we will loosen your tongue. You are either a sage of interesting experience, or you are a very old and a very wicked liar ; perhaps both." Meanwhile I drew up to the fireside.

The old fellow wore a skull-cap ; his face was wrinkled like parchment, but carried a certain vigour of expression that made the homely features quite interesting. Add the evidence of one-time great stature and breadth of shoulder, and there you have somewhat of a picture of the old man who sat huddled up over the fire warming his skinny, knotted hands.

We exchanged a few banalities and a bottle of wine was brought. His tongue began to wag under the mellowing influence of the precious liquid.

" Fine country round here," said I ; " one would think there ought to be plenty of sport, but not much traffic, eh ? "

" En effet. My son shot a panther within a kilometre of the house, right in the middle of the road ! Four months ago that was. Julie, get the photograph."

A big girl got up from a corner table where she was poring over a book with a young man. The man rose and left the house with a cheery good night.

" An excellent young fellow ! He is teaching my daughter Arabic. One must keep up with the times."

At this moment the young lady returned with the photo. I had a good look at her in the bright acetylene light. She was very comely. The schoolmaster was certainly marching with the times.

" Aha, monsieur," went on the old man, " there he is ; there is the skin. A fine one, ma foi, a fine one. And there is my son, le grand gaillard, un fin tireur, Sapristi ! " A rheumy tear oozed from his eye.

" You have been here long ? Surely it is very lonely ? "

" Not so lonely for us as for the English family that live in the woods."

I raised my eyebrows.

" A six hours' mule ride in the mountains, if you please ! " chimed in the patronne. " But then they are English——" she shrugged her shoulders.

" But then they are English ! " repeated grandpa. " Monsieur is from Alsace ? " I was silent. " *I* am from Alsace."

"So you have been through the Crimea?" I went on, to turn the subject of my nationality.

"I believe you!" He took an old pipe from his pocket and thoughtfully proceeded to fill it. "It was there that I learned to smoke this. Great days, nom d'un chien, great days. Pélissier was the man; Canrobert—je m'en fiche de Canrobert, mais Pélissier! I was at the Alma and Sebastopol. Not much, monsieur; I pray of you, I do not take much wine these days. À votre santé, monsieur."

"A la votre! Tell me, how did the English fight?"

"Très bien, très bien; but slow, so slow. They were never ready when we were. We should have been better without them." This was a home thrust, so I judged it wise to get on to another tack.

"Then, I suppose, you left the army!"

"I did, monsieur—to come here! I would have gone back to my Alsace. But then came the année terrible—and so I stayed on. There are many of us from Alsace-Lorraine in the country. Besides—this Republic——!" he held up his hands in very horror. I was beginning to feel like the interviewer on a Sunday paper; but still the thing had to be done, so I continued to probe.

"How different things must be now from what they were when you first came!"

"Monsieur does not deceive himself. Not more than fifty years ago; and, mark you, the Kabyles and the Arabs used to raid within ten miles of Algiers, cutting throats and burning houses all the way along. More than one razzia have I seen. Whilst lions would come even to the gates of the town at night-time."

"You remember the Mokrani rising quite well, then?"

"Alas, monsieur, but too well. Was I not one of the first company of franc-tireurs? The Arabs came to within a few miles of Algiers. One of my sons had a farm at Menerville. Everyone told him to move. He would not; being stiff-necked, like myself, he would stay behind to defend his farm! So they cut his throat from ear to ear. He was a fine boy. Yes, I remember the Mokrani rising, monsieur."

How I could have kicked myself! When will curiosity learn to curb its tongue! I felt as if I had applied the grand question to the old man, and blushed for very shame.

A heavy foot was heard in the passage, and in walked a big hulking fellow with a black beard and a voice as gentle as a child's.

"My grandson," said the old gentleman, as the new-comer and I shook hands. "And—the slayer of the panther. Monsieur, the hour is now late, so I will leave you in his company," with which he rose, all unaided, from his chair, and walked with a firm step to the inner door.

Though an excellent fellow, the grandson did not prove to have any flow of conversation; so after a cigarette or two I likewise took my leave and soon tumbled into bed. But, I warrant you, I very thoroughly inspected the bolts of my shanty before I did turn in.

The coolness of the dawn got me afoot at a very early hour. The glories of the rising sun opened to my view many vistas that the dusk of the previous evening had most successfully cloaked. For instance, there was really a most extraordinarily fine panorama across the valley, of which a wandering architect with an eye to the main chance had not been slow to take advantage.

On the very edge of the crest he had built a fine 'maison' of the nondescript style so dear to the Mediterranean eye. He was reported to run over every week-end by car to enjoy the view—a distance of some hundred miles. Good luck to him for a true sportsman ; but if I had to hang by my eyelids to the edge of a cliff in order to garage the car, as his chauffeur had to do, I should ask for a weekly rise in salary.

On enquiry I found that I had thirty-four kilometres to do before lunching at the hostel of Taourirt Ighl. There were two passes to be negotiated at altitudes of about 3000 feet, the Col de Tagma and the Col de Takdint.

I looked forward to some splendid scenery, and set off with extreme lightheartedness, behaving, I am ashamed to say, much like a schoolboy out of bounds. There was a fine morning freshness in the air, and the odour of the woods was delightful, sharpened as it was from time to time with the acrid smoke of a woodcutter's fire.

For the first few kilometres there is a very nice little descent, then the road commences to wind upwards through the trees. Every moment the scene gets more rugged and grand, until on the Col de Tagma it is really superb. Towards the north one sees the sea; to the south loom the vast masses of the Djurdjura range with its magnificent stretch of forest.

After crossing the neck, the road drops away gently past the source of the El-Hammam, and overlooks picturesque Kabyle villages. At times it runs through pine-woods, at times it clings to the face of a naked precipice.

At the fifty-fifth kilometre stone I sat down for a more or less well-earned rest, and a smoke. How well I remember the number of that stone! It formed a basis for so many subsequent calculations, heart-rending in the intensity of their pitiless logic. Off I set again in fine style.

I was having a lovely fast coast, with due regard to the sharp turn at the bottom of the hill, ruminating the while what would be the precise effect on a living body of the five-hundred-foot drop on my left-hand side, or immediate sudden contact with the cliff face on my right; and altogether considering how best to negotiate the sharp turn directly ahead, when—

I saw a huge yellow car swing half-round from the other side!

It was only twenty yards off and no room to pass. I had to act quickly. As the car was right on top of me I vaulted from the machine and turned a somersault into the deep ditch at the base of the cliff.

Whilst shooting through the air, I said to myself, "I must get the number of that car!" Funny, wasn't it? I tried to give myself a sort of half-twist on lighting.

Two things were very obvious. One was that I had had a very narrow escape, the other that that was more than could be said for the bicycle. As for the car, it was drawn up on the other side of the road, and a gentleman was hastily alighting; but the poor old "Pug" lay in the middle of the road, a horrid corpse.

"Are you hurt?" called the man. Two ladies looked over the back of the automobile in a most interested way. "Are you hurt?" they echoed.

"Rien de cassé!" I replied, as I painfully got up. Such was fortunately the case. I ought, of course, to have broken a leg at least; but, happily, I had quite escaped injury, except for a hole the size of a five-franc piece in one knee.

Vigorously congratulating me in strong American French, the stranger said:

"English, aren't you? So are we. Just come from Bougie. Got to make Tizi-Ouzou for lunch. Now, let's see about this machine of yours. I can't tell you how sorry I am about this; but there was no room on the side of the road—was there?"

Looking at the machine it seemed that there was none in the middle either, and I said so.

Perhaps I was scarcely polite, but I was sore and bruised, and gory as to the knee. However, the stranger took my remarks in quite good part, whilst together we set about gathering the fragments of the machine and proceeded to straighten things out a bit. By some miracle, which again I ascribe to Hermes, God of Travellers, the only parts of the bike that had serious damage were the front-wheel forks and handle; the frame was bent but a centimetre or two out of the true, and the gearing had quite escaped. Of the front wheel I prefer not to speak, but the fates compel me to.

The two halves of the rim were bent at right angles to each other; of the spokes but a bare half remained.

My handle-bars looked as if they had been tied into several knots.

"Wall, I guess it'll have to be fixed up somehow," said the man of the car. "Ahmet!" A half-negro chauffeur jumped from the driver's seat and ran up.

By this time I had sufficiently recovered to be able to take stock of my companion. He was a short, thick-set man of about thirty, clean-shaven, with a distinctly American cast of countenance and very broad in the shoulders.

Without more ado he stripped off his thick brown driving-coat and his jacket and set to work. I stood picturesquely by and looked on. It is so nice to watch others work! The sun was getting up, so that when he tried to straighten the invalid wheel against his knee, the perspiration soon began to fall. He was a good chap and worked hard, but I must say that I felt absolutely callous as to whether that wheel ever was straightened again or not.

Miracle of miracles! By repeated efforts of the most terrific kind my wheel was eventually adjusted so that it would run through the forks with a little persuasion. Not with any sense of freedom, you will understand, but sufficiently well to be some sort of a return for hard swearing. Sadly I saw the spokes removed. A Kabyle passed and stopped to wonder.

"How far is it to Taourirt Ighl?" I hazarded.

He shook his head.

"Kilometres?" said I, raising four fingers. I put up another finger. Again he shook his head. Up went another finger. Same result. Another and another went by. Seventeen fingers went up before he nodded. I said nothing. Sometimes one's feelings are too deep for words. Seventeen kilometres. Eleven miles nearly, and all uphill! I whistled.

"Yes, it is a bit rough!" said the man; "I fancy that job's about done; she'll just run through the forks—with care! 'Fraid we must be getting on to Tizi-Ouzou for lunch." He and the chauffeur climbed into the car again.

"Have a biscuit," said one of the ladies. "You'll want something before you get in. So sorry. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

And that was the last I saw of the yellow car.

Remained to be seen what could be done! I decided that the best thing to do was to bandage myself up a bit, which I did—to the intense interest of one or two small children who had sprung from apparently nowhere. This little duty performed, I had a mouthful of cognac, a nibble of chocolate, and off I set, for my knee was beginning to get stiff—horribly so. How on earth I managed to escape breaking my leg is more than I can tell. As from previous enquiry I heard that passers-by were few and far between—about three a week—it behoved me to get on.

In accordance with the rules of fate the pilgrim's progress was all uphill now over the Col de Takdint, the highest point in the route. Slow work, indeed, and tiresome; for as soon as I tried to rest, the knee went on strike.

Still, even this could not quite stifle my appreciation of the fine valley of the Soumane which wound its way along thousands of feet below, the snowy white peaks beyond, the huge craggy faces with serried ravine and precipice. There was something very melancholy about this devil's scaffolding; something, some spirit in it that seemed to yearn intensely for a 'je ne sais quoi.' A great forest of oak and cork-oak clung tenaciously to the sides of the mountains;

a fitting home for the djinn, the guardian of the mountains.

About five or six miles brought me to the maison cantonière, headquarters and stronghold of the road surveyor. I came across him leaning against the side of the building, despondently conversing with two or three natives. He was a tall, dark-bearded man with the most melancholy voice and gesture I have ever seen. Quite obviously, the surroundings had not only enchained but thoroughly mastered him in mind and body.

He was very sympathetic. Perhaps because he admired the "Pug."

"De la chance, de la bonne chance!" said he, when I told him of the accident.

I asked him how about getting on to El-Kseur.

"Il me semble que vous pourrez y arriver, en marchant tout doucement. Downhill all the way after the hotel. I do it once a month or so." He lapsed into a contemplative, but quite polite, silence.

As he said to me on parting, passing years made him love silence and loneliness for their own sakes. Neighbours were ever a thorn in the flesh—tongue-waggers and retailers of lies. Taourirt Ighl suited him to a nicety.

I am sorry to say the surveyor's kilometres to the hotel lengthened out at the latter end like Irish miles, but even those come to an end if one perseveres; so eventually my goal hove in sight.

To all appearance the châlet was just a simple farm-house; and in this instance the appearance bore a remarkable likeness to the truth.

I was beginning to understand by this time that the finer gloss of civilisation had to be left behind; a view which was fully confirmed by the state of affairs at Taourirt Ighl.

To begin with, the châlet was neither more nor less than a small quadrangular farm-house with the parlour on one side of the gateway and the kitchen on the other; an arrangement probably due to concern lest the guests should smell the cabbage-water. On the other hand, for those who had cultivated a finer taste in smell, there was an extensive midden almost under the parlour window.

One flea-bitten sheep-dog got up and inspected me; beyond that, there seemed not to be a soul about the place.

Eventually, however, I managed to find a stick with which I beat upon the doors like a squadron of invading dragoons. The manœuvre had its effect, and a Kabyle woman appeared from somewhere.

She was a big, handsome creature, and stared me down as bold as brass when I made my enquiries, strong in the knowledge of the very bright robe she wore and the gay new handkerchief that bound her hair. Seldom have I seen such large silver earrings as hung from her ears. She had no French, I had no Berber; but a man and a woman can always understand each other where two men would fail egregiously. So it did not take me long to make her understand that food of some sort was essential, even if there was no sleeping accommodation to be had in the place. The patron was away and his good lady upstairs asleep, not to be disturbed for any blundering stranger who might like to pass. Hence my refreshment was limited to an omelette and a little courtesy-wine, which was in reality vinegar.

Even in such an out-of-the-way corner appearances count for something. At any rate, that was the conclusion I arrived at when I found myself relegated to the kitchen for food.

Again I bandaged my knee, whilst I continued my efforts in the Barbary tongue to hide my nervousness. The woman stood stolidly in the further corner of the room and stared at me with an owl-like expression that put me utterly out of countenance, until, fortunately, one of the local squires rode up to the door on a most sorry mule and saved the situation.

Whilst this hook-nosed individual successfully engaged the maid's attention by the splendour of his carriage and the flash of his white burnous, I slipped quietly out of the kitchen to examine the machine. It was then that the patronne put in an appearance, in such manner as to lead me to believe that I had been under observation all the time from the corner of some obscure window.

Ah, monsieur had had an accident ! Indeed terrible !

But, unfortunately, unavoidable on such distressing roads. Monsieur's machine was in a state, ma foi! He was assuredly not going to ride to El-Kseur! Vraiment, then let him beware how he went!

"The road is bad, madame?"

"Mais oui, monsieur. There are no walls, and it winds and twists all the way down. With turnings of the steepest, and most terribly sharp! It was on this very day last year, mark you, monsieur, that a gentleman was coming back from Yacouren on his auto. One who knows the road well, mind you! Just about this time too! It was getting on towards the evening. Well, monsieur, a most terrible thing happened, a most awful thing, I do assure you. The brake gave way, and he went over the edge of the precipice! Ah, it was terrible!! Was he dashed to pieces? Ah, monsieur, had it not been for the good God and His angels, quelle triste affaire! But his motor-car was caught between two pinnacles of rock as it fell! There he had to stay all the night until they came and raised him with ropes. C'est bien la verité, monsieur!"

I looked at the machine, and looked at the good dame, and sighed deeply over the frailty of human nature. Then I prayed her for the bill; with many a shake of the head she brought it me, good soul . . .!

I must have been at least four or five kilometres on the road before I recovered.

Provided the front wheel holds, thought I to myself, I shall yet sleep in the most perfect comfort. Always

VIEW FROM TAOURIRT IGHIL

provided that it does hold, of course. For the time being it was going sideways, after the manner of a crab. About every two or three kilometres I had to get down to let the tyre cool and adjust a nut or two.

Fortunate it is that there is no cloud without its silver lining. The roads were excellent.

As twilight began to fall the gorge took on a most eerie appearance. Blasted out of the rock, the road wound in and out, hanging to the edge of a precipice or else a steep sloping hill-side that fell away downward to the river below. A pleasant forest caught the rising mist and held it—like a winding-sheet for the heroes of Numidia dead and gone. Across the ravine, on the mountain sides opposite, the native paths crossed and re-crossed like the strands of a red spider's web. Melancholy calls echoed across every now and then. Soon the paths died from view, and you could see nothing but gaunt overhanging trees. Occasionally you would come up suddenly with a jerk when you found yourself close on the edge.

Not a soul passed me during that little run from Taourirt Ighl to El-Kseur, some twenty miles or so; it was eerie—but it was fine!

On getting back into the "traffic" near El-Kseur, I decided for the good of the human race to get off and walk. It would have been most ignominious to have been run over by a donkey at such a stage of the proceedings, yet a very likely thing, so dark was it.

As I have been in many dirty hotels in my life, I will say nothing about the accommodation provided at the resting-house I honoured with my presence. Indeed, everything was made up for by the kindness of the landlord and his wife.

Casual enquiry soon brought an avalanche of information upon my devoted head as regarded the most likely man for mending a bicycle. I fancy the greater part of the township of Bougie must have lived and thriven exceedingly well by the pursuit of that most estimable calling. Under the weight of such knowledge, I went to bed at an early hour and—missed the morning train.

"You had a great good fortune, sir," said mine host, as I received my bill. "It is only three months ago since a tourist like yourself essayed to travel the gorge road by night on a motor-car. When he got half-way down his nerve failed him, and he got off to sleep by the roadside! Now mind you mention my name to the cycle-maker at Bougie. On the strength of it I feel sure that he will give you very good terms. Good day, mon cher monsieur, on vous remercie en."

It was only when I purchased my ticket that I discovered there was a bad two-franc piece amongst the change. But of that perhaps I ought to say nothing.

And so I came to Bougie.

CHAPTER X

EASTWARDS FROM BOUGIE

THREE trains a day is the grand total of the communication between El-Kseur and Bougie, yet, despite that, the town seems to exist in comparative comfort. Built on the side of a steep hill, Bougie is thoroughly French in appearance. It is a port of commercial importance, doing a large transport trade in wine, despite the dread Phylloxera which has lately made its appearance. From the bedroom window in my hotel, which was well up the hill-side, I looked directly down on to the port and railway station. At the very moment of my arrival the boat from Marseilles slipped quietly into the harbour.

Ever desirous of forcing the growth of that nursling, the Algerian trade, the Government has passed a law whereby all merchandise from the port must sail under the French flag, a policy that brings its own punishment in its train. When you imagine an equally heavy monopoly granted to the railways, you can well see into what a spider's web the wretched trader is cast. If possible, the train service, both for merchandise and passengers, is worse than the boat service, and decidedly more exorbitant, despite the large subventions that the State has to hand over every year to the former.

Like all the ports on the Algerian littoral, Bougie is artificial—hence the great expense of keeping it up—and no very comfortable place anyway under stress of weather.

In the old days the Kingdom of Bougie formed a sort of buffer state between the Aghlabitic rulers of Kairouan and the Khalifate of Morocco. For one hundred years it held out; until at last it was conquered to the light of blazing villages, alternately by the Merinides of Morocco and the Hafsides of Tunis.

Now it is torn asunder by the conflicting efforts of the French on the one side and the ubiquitous foreigner on the other. As usual, the said foreigner holds all the trumps in the war of trade. Fishing is almost entirely in the hands of the Italians, many of whom are reported to be still very excellent servants of their King. The quarries are in Spanish hands; whilst the few mines permitted are in those of the English! Phosphates and the like are in English hands. The Spanish hold the halfa-trade, perfidious Albion having first option, so to speak. What will happen to the minerals, the onyx, etc., when at last the Government does allow the mines to be properly exploited might be matter for a very interesting prophecy or two.

Let us turn from this depressing picture of affairs to the effect it has on the local sense of humour.

Nowadays Bougie is graced with a prison for military convicts, but that was not always so.

It happened in the days of unregeneracy that a certain ‘zephir,’ or military prisoner, for want of a better place was lodged in an empty dwelling-house. The key was turned on him; the sergeant and escort departed. As this young man leant out of a window, doubtless ruminating on the sins of the past and those which were to come, if ever he could get out of his present damn-hole, he observed a compatriot with wife and family; as they wandered up and down in such an aimless manner with open mouths and staring eyes, not incorrectly the zephir concluded that the honest folks were new-comers to the country. Doubtless, also, they were in need of help.

“Ohé, mon vieux!” he called out to paterfamilias, “dost thou seek a house?”

“Oui, monsieur!” replied the new ‘colon.’

“This little residence is just your handwriting. No doubt you would like to inspect it?”

“Oui, monsieur.”

“By one of the greatest errors of the world, I have just dropped the key and lost it. Thou hadst best run round to the blacksmith—four doors down—and get him to come and pick the lock. But as there are several people after this house at this very moment, the wise man is silent in tongue and quick in decision.”

Not waiting to hear the end of the sentence, the shrewd colonist raced round to the blacksmith as desired. To such effect did he run that in a remarkably short space of time prison doors were open, and our friend the zephir doing his duty as an agent with the air of a practised hand.

"Now look here, mon ami," said the 'agent,' "you have assuredly taken a great liking to this house."

"Oui, monsieur."

"Well now, I like you; and I am going to do you a kindness which would assuredly land me in gaol were it but known, so pray be silent about it. For two hundred francs and another four hundred when the transaction is completed you can have this house. What do you think of that for an offer, eh?"

A family consultation was held whilst the zephir bit his moustache for fear of the guard. But at last the discussion was finished, and with many lively expressions of thanks the money was handed over.

"We always like to help a new chum on his way," said the 'agent,' as he gave a receipt. "You are fortunate in obtaining the house in such a manner, for it is my firm belief that the colonel himself was about to take up his residence here. Good afternoon!"

Happy in his stroke of good fortune, the colonist lost no time whatever in moving in with his somewhat scanty belongings. As the final "sticks" were passing the threshold, who should turn up but the sergeant with his escort.

The scene that followed no pen is fitted to describe. It ended in the poor victim being deposited in the cells for the night!

As for the zephir, a short search revealed him, surrounded by half the regiment, at a neighbouring café. He was so elated with his little escapade that it took six file to get him to the station, where we will hope his glib tongue again stood him in good stead.

I think I stated before that Bougie is situated on the side of a steep hill, so that you are perpetually going up hill or down hill or round the corner.

As regards the town itself, there is not very much to see; the native is so very down-at-heels. The place is altogether very different from the splendid city it is reported to have been in the eleventh century, when it possessed 100,000 inhabitants, with houses and factories flourishing. What cannot be taken from the town, however, is the magnificent site it holds; the splendid view and the lovely forest behind.

Having passed through the successive hands of the Romans, who called the place Galdae, the Berbers, the Arabs, the Turks and the French, which peoples have all in turn eradicated the weeds and put the town in a state of defence, it can well be imagined that there are many historic remains; and, indeed, that is so. But as I saw none of them, I must refer you to the guide-book for information on the point. I would, however, draw attention to one very remarkable thing that I did come across, to wit—a bath! Perfectly true that it was in the scullery; but there, the fact remains that there actually was a bath in the hotel at which I stayed. Furthermore there was a good cook, together with other items of considerable comfort. There was also an hotel porter whom I spent most of the time in dodging. He was so very anxious that I should take a 'bain maure.'

From my hotel I sped to the Hotel Richelieu, to get out of the porter's way. All the rank and fashion seems to collect at the Café Richelieu during the hours of relaxation, that is to say before the serious business of lunch or dinner commences. Though, to tell the honest truth, in Bougie the good burghers seem much to rely on the old saw about health, wealth, wisdom, and early rising. Business is in full swing by half-past six or seven in the morning; we are all abed again by ten at night. So presumably we are in a fair way to become millionaires.

It can scarcely be said that Bougie is a town of cut-throat prices—rather the reverse. Furthermore, a stranger is obviously a sheep for the shearing. I had occasion to go to the station to visit the valise that always dutifully travels ahead of me by rail on my journeys. As it was merely a question of getting out one or two insignificant items of linen, I undid the wretched thing in the luggage-office. Two gendarmes stood guard to see that I kept my fingers from picking and stealing, whilst the third made out the most terrible bill of costs up to date that it has ever been my misfortune to have the paying of.

In some sort this little experience prepared me for "shelling out" when the time came for paying my bicycle bill. As good luck would have it, however, I was to some extent further fortified beforehand by a quiet stroll along the cliff road to the Source des Agaides. And a very nice walk it is too!

You leave the town by the Bab-el-Bahar, one of the old Saracen gates, and eventually come to a path cut along the face of the cliff. Practically the whole of the path has been cut out of the living rock and you pass through one grotto-like tunnel after another. With the blue sea below and the overhanging cliff above, you can enjoy to the full the rippling flash of the sunlight and the creamy splash of the breakers. At the end of this most delightful saunter you come upon a grove of trees, and it is in the heart of this grove that the famous source lies sheltered. Who the Agaides were originally, it would perhaps be difficult to say; but there is not the slightest doubt that they have now turned themselves into a limited company for the exploitation of ginger-pop! Their altars are of beer-stained wood; even their High Priest wears the very outward and visible insignia of an Italian waiter. On the way home I met a family of pleasant-faced Germans outward bound. They breathed noisily and carried buns in a paper bag. Why does this great nation always look so hot when taking its pleasure?

My departure from Bougie was somewhat delayed by my having to wait until the bank opened, in order that I might reinforce the sinews of war, and also make one or two important additions to my rather limited stock of linen. I must say that Bougie was somewhat behind the times when it came to the matter of underwear ; but what the clothes lacked in quality they made up in colour, and so I contrived to be satisfied.

Running down the steep hill from my hotel with the usual benedictions absolutely streaming off my shoulders, I very nearly ran through the dining-room window of the new and particularly luxurious hostel that I had been at such pains to avoid.

On consideration I determined to go warily for the future. Another factor in the decrease of my speed was the distressing state of the road for some kilometres out of the town ; no one could blame the local council at any rate for being extravagant in their expenditure on road repair. Fortunately the state of affairs mends when one turns off the main road and proceeds on the way to Mersa. The road keeps pretty close to the shores of the bay in which Bougie is situated.

The bay is a fine one with a foreground of most beautiful sand and a background of savage retreating hills, stamped in blue. This strip of really fertile land through which you spin is given over to the joys of the vine, the olive, the caroube, the orange, not forgetting the more solid products of alimentation, such as lucerne-grass and the cereals. There is some tobacco and almonds and a fair showing of palms. Local farms on the whole are of a fair size, so that the district has every sign of prosperity and civilisation, a state of affairs reflected with considerable distinctness in the demeanour of the natives, who are considerably less polite than further inland.

Towards Mersa the road undulates along the side of the cliff, past a few country-seats of undeniable taste in point of position.

Lunching out was evidently the order of the day at Mersa, for several chattering groups sat at déjeuner under the trees that bordered the road and overhung the tables. For myself, I selected the one that was tenanted by the fewest caterpillars and ordered food. Fate so had it that my neighbour was also a loafing cyclist.

We exchanged the ordinary information of the road and, as usual, the assurance of my bad accent betrayed my nationality.

"How pleasant to meet one of your nation again," said my acquaintance. "It is but the year before last that I was walking the hospitals in Edinburgh."

I stared. Who was this grizzled little man in the travel-stained knickerbocker suit?

"I am an old man now," continued the old gentleman, caressing his beard, "and I suppose that I have seen the greater part of the world in this manner."

"You do not practise now," I hazarded. A decidedly interesting old fellow!

"Not for the last ten years; but when I come across a town that I like, why, then I stay and do a little hospital work if they will let me. I have no family, few friends, and fewer enemies; that being so, to my mind there is no better existence than the life awheel. For the elderly man it has all the charms that the walking-tour has for the young, with just the proper lessening of fatigue."

"Quite so! But do you not find the hill-climbing somewhat of a fatigue?"

"When it comes to that I put myself in the hands of the railway company. Well, well, I must be going now. Who did you say was the least incompetent cycle-maker in Bougie? Try Catalonia next time. On exagère toujours un peu, n'est-ce pas? But it's quite worth the seeing, for all that. Au revoir!"

And so we parted. I wonder if we shall ever meet again, that funny little old man in the dirty grey and I. For me there is always the suggestion of a pang at parting, even with a roadside acquaintance. Many people have told me the same thing; you get on the road to get away from people but—the meshes of the primeval gregarious net are too strong for you.

On the recommendation of the doctor, I was to make for an hotel at Mansouriah that was run by Italians. Excellent people, he said, and not over given to garlic.

Ziama Mansouriah has no outstanding claim to fame of itself, except that it is in some vogue as a summer resort, and is possessed of famous stalactite caverns about six miles the other side from Bougie.

As this halting-place represented the last link with the Mediterranean and tripperdom I was anxious to be done with it and strike inward on a bee-line for Biskra. On these grounds I made short work of the beautiful coast road with its red cliffs and its numerous tunnels. A large portion of it has been blasted out of the living rock with that frequent tunnelling which so delights the French engineer; altogether one would think that the road must have been one of the most expensive of those kindly presents that the 'contribuables' of Mother France were at one time in the habit of being called upon to make on behalf of their offspring of outre-mer. For all that, the traveller benefits considerably; and a man who is blind to the exquisite colouring of the salmon-tinted rocks, as the sun comes streaming through a tunnel, had better retire to collect orange-peel on Margate sands.

At one particularly interesting corner of the road I came across a curious sort of crane hanging out over a little promontory, right over the water. "Ho! ho!" thinks I to myself, "we are within close touch of Europe now!" It was so. For the thought had scarcely flashed across my brain, when round the turn came strolling a young lady with a bassinette and twins. Her whole appearance was so distinctive of

Hornsey that I stared in amazement. Indeed, the truth was soon out, and a nascent mystery nipped in the bud; for the next turning revealed a zinc-mine, and there was no mistaking the engineer in blue overalls who leant against the side of a shanty smoking a "cutty." Time pressed rather, but it was certainly incumbent upon me to apply the test.

"Good evening!" I called as I passed. The man took his pipe out and stared.

"Good evening!" he replied, expectorating slowly, as he turned to watch me down the road.

At any rate I had given him food for an evening's conversation, and my heart rejoiced.

The next item on the programme was a very pretty little cave of stalactites open to view at the roadside. Now if this had been at Matlock, for instance, there would have been an extortionate entrance-fee due to the guardian genius at the gate. Here, for some unknown reason—the air, I suppose—there was no guardian; it was free. It was a really fine cave. Should I get down and have a look?

"No," thought I, "there are sure to be much better ones further along," which it was true there were. But that is not the point. What I really wish to emphasise is, that with every cave I passed my expectations kept rising.

I came to the final turn that brings you sweeping down on the green fields of Mansouriah without having inspected a single cave! Isn't that human nature all over! One never really appreciates a thing unless one has to pay for it. All my hopes were now centred on the much-advertised caverns beyond Ziama.

Of the general appearance of Mansouriah there is truly but little to be said, except that it is a typical French village that hopes eventually to become a watering-place, and has already in it three hotels. To that end it is intent on new roads and drain-pipes. A smile expanded from ear to ear of the round face of the pleasant little Italian proprietor, who was airing his corpulence in the doorway when I rode up. From his manner I was led to believe that even drain-pipes begin to lose their interest when the lean months of the year are upon one.

Hastily explaining my wants, I mounted the hotel terrace, deposited my traps, and partook of a little refreshment. I was then given a bare room of such scrupulous and polished cleanliness that I had perforce to shiver. Though whether on account of the loss of that cherished ideal—Italian dirt—or not, would be more than I could say. If that were the case, it was not the only ideal to be broken in the waning hours of that balmy afternoon.

By the time I had covered the six additional miles to the far-famed caves I was quite sufficiently tired to be critical. An undulating coast road becomes irritating when it has to be traversed against time to escape the dark. There was just one thing, however, that enabled me to bear my "white-man's burden," a something that has been the mainstay of all great pioneers from the days of the Garden of Eden to date. I was going to get something for nothing! I was going to see one of the finest sights in the world without having to pay one cent in the way of entrance money! The feeling was almost too much for me; I rammed the pedals round with a feverish will.

"You cannot possibly miss it," I had been told. So, naturally, I was all agog to see this Aladdin's Cave. On and on I rode, and still no wonderful vista of sparkling crystals spread itself before my astounded gaze. There was no person of whom I could seek direction except one little Arab ragamuffin, and he was miles behind by this time. Finally I came to a sign-post. Now, thought I, at last I shall know where I am. In this assumption I was quite correct. I had only overshot my goal by three miles, that was all!

With a growing feeling of anger at my own blindness in having been so silly as to miss the place, I turned in my tracks and rode slowly back, scanning the surroundings with the utmost care. Eventually I returned to the very place where I had seen the little boy. In a spirit of desperation I determined to ask him if he could direct me to this elusive cavern.

"Si, monsieur," he replied. "Cette porte-là en face. Moi, je suis le gardien!!"

In a sort of dazed way I looked at the door designated. Sure enough, there on the other side of the road was a door hung on rusty old hinges. Over the lintel was a board, and on that board I read what wind and rain had deigned to leave: "Entrée de la caverne. Prix d'entrée 1 franc. Bougie gratuite." So vividly do I remember my feelings to this very day that I feel more than inclined to draw a veil over the rest of my visit to Mansouriah, but a duty towards the reader compels me to reveal my further movements on this occasion.

Having carefully pocketed the franc, my diminutive guide gave me a candle and told me to duck my head going down the steps. As by the time he had said this I had already a bump the size of a walnut on the crown of my manly brow, the advice was perhaps somewhat late. One should not, however, look a gift-horse in the mouth, so we will pass to a consideration of the cavern.

You first of all descend some highly risky steps made, I regret to state, not by the dæmonic builders of old, but by a very jobbing contractor of to-day; one of the type whom it wants a Xerxes to deal with effectively. When these have been negotiated with more or less success you slip and slide for a few yards more in the semi-obscurity, and the guide then raises his candle high in the air. "Regarde les stalactites!" says he.

Fantastic festoons of a dirty greenish-yellow stone seem to dance to and fro as the candle flickers here and there. All around, you see corkscrew and spindle and knotted cord in moist, dripping gypsum. The floor is covered with upright shafts of the same standing by great flat slabs of it strangely ribbed and twisted. From time to time you catch the flashing of a crystal. The dome of the cavern shoots right up into the interior of the hill-side. Involuntarily you wonder what glabrous and unclean spirit it shelters? What ghoul, jinn, boggart, lepre-chaune or oufe? With a sickly shudder down your spine you turn to the stairs and stumble up again to the light of day.

That cavern affected me all the way back to my hotel, in so much so, that I had but small appetite for dinner until I discovered that my only fellow-diner was an itinerant photographer, full of the gossip of the road. On first sight I had sized him up as a commercial, and was pleased to find that I was not far out.

After food we foregathered with some of the local worthies in the café. Over a friendly glass the sprightly fellow brought out some specimens of his art for exhibition, on the strength of which he managed to secure sufficient orders at any rate to see him through to the next week-end. He then unrolled the portable background that he carried with him; we gazed in wonder. As he took his camera to pieces and put it together again before our very eyes, we gasped with amazement.

At the suggestion of the landlady's daughter, who was rather taken by the fellow's long and silky moustache, the gramophone was put on. None of your coon songs or ragtimes; but the real thing! 'Il bel canto' all the time. The photographer wiped away a tear.

"The hearts of us artists always vibrate in unison," he sighed. "I can just imagine mademoiselle singing that song." He glanced across at the young lady in question. She smiled sadly.

"Papa, I feel sure I ought to have another 'pose'; if monsieur could manage to get them done before . . . ?"

At this critical moment the outer door swung open, and in swaggered a gigantic Italian mason, or at least so I took him to be, followed by a diminutive companion of the nondescript variety. Both of them were pretty well "on," and had it not been for the fact that the local gendarme was also of the merry party, I should have doubted the possibility of their obtaining refreshment. By great good fortune everybody was of jovial mood, so that the men's hiccups were taken in quite good part. They sat down noisily over a bottle of absinthe, and I resumed my conversation with the man of the camera without paying them any further attention. In fact, so interested did I become in the man's yarns that it required a resounding thump on the table to inform me that all was not going well with the gallant two.

"The English," cried the big man, throwing his wideawake on to the table at his elbow, "the English, bah! I have no fear of them."

My good friend, the patron, began to get worried, and glanced nervously across at me. I sat back placidly smoking. The mason was so delightfully drunk that, whatever turn events took, I felt sure there would be something of interest turning up. He thumped his chest, gazed round the room for approbation, slapped the table, then again took up the thread of his discourse.

"Look at my arms; feel them. There's muscle for you! And my legs! They believe themselves to be masters, but I tell you I have worked beside them for long enough, and I have no fear of them." He took one great gulp of his absinthe, another, and then another. Slowly he tried to rise from his chair, but sat down again heavily, with a thick gasp. "I—tell—you—they—are—nothing—but—a—lot—of—drunkards . . ." So saying, he slid gently but surely to the floor and lay there. In the general laughter that followed I was a hearty joiner. Finally, the policeman and a friend helped the man to his feet and started to escort him home.

It is sometimes bad policy to wait for the encore, so summoning up my vilest English accent I bade them all good night and retired to bed. Through the half-open door I saw more than one curious glance cast in my direction. How dearly I would have loved to listen to the conversation that followed.

CHAPTER XI

A GOOD SAMARITAN

As I guided the "Pug" carefully past the drain-pipes on to the open road, I could not help wondering what was in store for me. Up to the present I had been keeping touch to a great extent with the coast, in the very hub of the colonisation, as one might say; henceforth, everything was to be new and strange. I was to traverse the land of the gourbi, the burnous and the wandering shepherd—the High Plateaux in fact—down to the gates of the Desert, with its swaying camel caravans and kaleidoscopic colours, its waving date-palms and its purple oases. "En avant!"

For the first part of the journey I had to retrace my steps to the extent of a few kilometres, as far as a hamlet called Souk-el-Tenin, to be quite accurate.

At Souk-el-Tenin you turn down to the left and follow the Oued Agrioun, mounting gently all the time. From this point up to Kerrata runs one of the very finest things in the way of scenery you can get in the whole of Algeria, which is saying a good deal.

Soon after leaving El-Tenin the mountains begin to close in on top of you, and the heat, radiating from the surrounding rocks, begins to get rather oppressive. Under these circumstances, even a slight incline, when it runs the wrong way, is apt to make one perspire. Being wise in my generation in certain matters, I selected a very charming resting-spot where, as I sat on a low wall, I could see all the way up the beautiful valley, with its steep, heavily-wooded sides clothed in delicately-shaded greens. In and out the river wound, higher and higher reached the mountain peaks, as the eye followed the meandering course back into the interior. On the other side of the valley ran a road like a ribbon. I was just watching a party of natives wandering along the red ribbon, when a man's shadow fell across the parapet beside me; I started, turning sharply. An individual in a képi and a white tunic was standing beside me.

"Bonjour, monsieur," said he; "a fine view, is it not?"

"Good morning," I replied; "it is indeed a pretty piece of country. I see that you also are a cyclist." I had noticed another bicycle leaning against the wall beside mine.

"Yes, I am a 'garde-forestier.' I find the 'bécane' a most useful method of getting about these roads, so speedy, yet so quiet, you know; though for the time being I am off duty myself. A cigarette?"

Such an acquaintance was by no means to be lightly put off, so I disposed myself to talk at length over

IN AND OUT THE RIVER WOUND

the proffered smoke. Whilst doing so I had leisure to observe my new companion.

Of medium height, slim, and very dark, he was from the Midi, as I judged. He looked extremely smart in his white tunic, khaki breeches and gaiters; his left hand played idly with a short, loaded, hunting-crop. A nasty customer to get the wrong side of, but inclined to be pleasant if spoken fairly.

"It being the green-hour, more or less," said I, "will you join me in a nip of cognac?"

He smacked his lips at the idea, being, after the manner of Government officials, a judge of the finer brands of spirit. Having thus thoroughly broken the ice, I invited him to sit beside me on the wall, which he did with great good-nature.

"I was just giving my colleague a little help with his patrol-duty," explained the garde; "though, as a general rule, he takes this side of the river and I take that. I have a beat of about forty kilometres square."

"Then what are your duties?" I asked warily.

"Oh, mainly forestry, the minor jobs of road-building, bridging, etc., together with a general over-seeing of the natives. But come and have some lunch with me and I will show you my house!"

I can assure you that I was little loth to accept so delightful a means of avoiding the casual pub; it needed but mighty little persuasion to hitch me into his train.

As we cycled gently along through the scented wood that ran straight down the steep hill-side into the river far below, my guide and mentor pointed out to me the various objects of interest on the other side. For instance, the great mine of iron ore that crowned the opposing hill-side.

"English," he remarked; "nearly all these mines are English. We have not yet acquired the 'goût mineur'!"

"Are there many mines about here?" I asked.

"A mountain of ore!" he ejaculated. "A veritable mountain of ore. But it is only now beginning to show a return on the outlay. They have also come across a good many old Roman mines, copper and the like; several are working at the present moment.

"By the bye," he continued, "I hope that you can toss an omelette?"

I nodded.

"Ever since my poor wife died my staff has been reduced to one, and I do all the cooking myself. Here we are; so come along."

We turned up a little ramp by the roadside, so entering into a pleasant garden well shaded with trees, mostly beech. Down to the right ran an orangery and general kitchen garden, to the left was the dwelling-house. My host explained that in general the forest-guards work in pairs; in consequence, the house is built in two parts, or really three, you might say; one single-storeyed three-roomed dwelling-house flanking either side of the quadrangle; a third building across the bottom of the yard connects up the two houses and serves to contain the stables, and so forth; finally, on the fourth side, comes a wall with a heavily-barred double gate.

So that the place forms a perfect little stronghold of its kind, well capable of keeping the attackers out for a considerable time should the Kabyles ever take it into their heads again to start a little playful throat-cutting, which competent authorities say is quite within the bounds of possibility if ever France should have to withdraw many troops from the country for Metropolitan reasons. Even the small movements of men necessitated by the Moroccan war raised high hopes in the heart of the more excitable, whilst many of the native school-teachers looked on and approved. For the French have the same penchant as ourselves for overloading weak stomachs with rich food in the matter of learning.

For the moment let me be content with saying that this education is practically confined to boys, girls being, of course, of no account—though in a very few cases the Kabyle chief, canny man, has been known to permit his daughters to attend a sort of ladies' school in the hopes that he will be able to make something out of what they learn in the way of embroidery, weaving, and the like.

As for the boys, I know of more than one good Christian youth who would supremely approve of a course of the native school, where you do nothing but sit on the floor with a slate on your knees and fall gently to sleep over snatches of the Koran.

The ' taleb ' licks knowledge into his charges at the rate of fifteen francs per head per annum. Yet the native father, by preference, sends his offspring to the native school rather than trust them to the European-trained product of the Medersa, who copies his European confrère in trying to sandwich a little instruction in gardening and cultivation between slabs of "language."

On the whole, perhaps, he is not far wrong, as the native mind is no great receptacle for wisdom, if one may judge by the results of the "carpet"-schools, where they try to galvanise into life once more that moribund object, the Algerian carpet. It is true that they try to reproduce some of the finest efforts of the Great Age emanating from various other countries, such as Persia, Turkey, which is perhaps flying high. But let us not be unjust ; if an autopsy of the Algerian carpet were to be held it would probably mean a verdict of death from poison. For this sad state of things nobody is to be thanked but the Jew bagman, who sells his filthy cheap chemical dyes to the "masters" of the Maghreb, thereby destroying the scheme of colour that of old was hall-marked by the makers of Djebel Amour.

On the other hand, the earthenware jar, that you see so gracefully poised on the head of a girl at the well, has probably had those faultless geometric lines, that constitute its sole ornament, traced by the dusky hand of its carrier.

My host had quite a liking for native pottery. Some very fine examples lay scattered about his simply-furnished home. Pottery and cork-carving, he explained to me, held first place in his scheme of recreation, together with the reading of Shakespeare! To my surprise, an excellent edition of the gentleman, whom I suppose we now ought to call Bacon, graced the centre of a table-top, which had been cut by its owner from a huge cork tree. Very fine the cork was too, though a trifle uneven when it came to laying the cloth.

After the table was laid, the next operation, of course, was the preparation of the meal; but before that came a very important function, one that entailed ceremony, and was on no account to be omitted.

It was necessary that I should see his horse.

Now, to my shame I say it, but personally I have but a very limited knowledge of horseflesh; consequently, I keep my tongue between my teeth as much as possible on such occasions. Even the ignoramus, however, has his moments of enlightenment, when he can see as far through a brick wall as most people; so it was with me. A fine Arab always appeals to the eye. My host's was dapple-grey—not much bigger than a large pony; her name was Violet, and she stepped about her loose-box as if she were treading on velvet, a picture of dainty grace from her clear full eye to her highly-polished hoof. I was graciously permitted to stroke her glossy coat with one hand whilst I rubbed her delicate nostrils with the other. Violet was manifestly pleased; and Violet being pleased, so was her master. But he thoughtfully gave her a little more food before fully opening the flood-gates of reminiscence.

"You would scarcely think a little beggar like that could carry a hulking fellow like me for very long, would you?" said he. He was certainly not hulking, but politeness demanded that I should agree. Chump, chump, chump! Violet munched her barley and oats in silence. My friend looked over his shoulder to see if she were listening. "Well, she did," he went on in a low voice; "carried me for ten hours yesterday; ma foi, on the move the whole time and I never left the saddle once. Mon dieu, right up in the hills too!"

"Great Scott!" I said, "how perfectly extraordinary. But these creatures don't know what fatigue is. I expect she can climb like a goat!"

"Of a verity you are correct, monsieur. Now it was only the other day that I was directing the construction of a new culvert over a little stream. Our only means of getting across was an old tree that had been used by the natives as a bridge. My foreman asked me how I was going to get Violet across. When I told him she could walk across like the rest of us, he laughed at me; so I just took the bridle in one hand and started across myself; she followed me with perfect ease and absolute sureness, as if she had been accustomed to it all her life. The natives said they had never seen anything like it in their lives before, and I can tell you these Arabs know something."

Violet looked at her master in an affectionate way. He felt encouraged to proceed, his voice growing more animated with every word.

"Really, monsieur, you would feel intensely surprised if I were to tell you everything that horse can do, but I will not strain your credulity. Now you would scarcely believe a horse could count, would you?"

I said that there had been, of course, many supposed cases of a like nature, but one had never come under my direct observation before. The garde said that he was not in the slightest surprised. In fact, he himself could call to mind no other case of a like nature. "Yet that animal counts every single tree that we have cut during the day. I say, 'Violet, how many?' She strikes the ground with her fore-foot in reply. . . . !"

When, eventually, we emerged from the stable the sun was still shining brightly—but all memories of the ragout had gone! It was my host who first called to mind the business in hand. Full half a bottle of wine was absorbed, however, before we could really settle down to work, but then waiting sharpens the appetite. Though we had to wash the plates, clean the knives, and light the fire beforehand, yet there was a succulence about the finished article that will linger in my memories of stew for many a long day to come. I would back my garde forestier in his primitive kitchen over that battered old grate against any 'cordon bleu' that ever squashed duck on the banks of the Seine or the Thames. Need I add that the omelette was a dream?

As we sipped the last of his cognac, I asked him which play of Shakespeare he liked best.

"'The Tempest,'" he replied. "I feel much like Prospero myself!" Knowing exactly what he meant, and sympathising, I did not smile, so he went on: "Taking them all round, men are much like the spirits of the island, and Caliban is in many respects reminiscent of the average Kabyle. Full of fancies and insane jealousies. The Berber mind is just like his language, composed chiefly of obscure twists, with an absolute incapacity for coming straight to the point. Beautiful until you look into it; then you find that all is hazy. The same kink in their nature that affects their language has also its bearing on the tribal system." His eyes glowed through the cigarette-smoke with the light of the enthusiast.

"How so?" said I, having in memory the Scottish clans.

My host crossed his legs, lit a fresh cigarette, and settled down to talk.

"Well, it's this way. Across every tribe, every clan, there strikes a line of cleavage. That cleavage is the 'çof,' or faction. One çof may run through many tribes, hence there is no cohesion anywhere; for a man would stick to his 'çof' rather than his tribe, to such an extent that it becomes a disruptive force rather than an element of strength. From the days of Jugurtha it has always been so. It is this that makes the country so easy to conquer, so difficult to hold! You can be sure of loyalty nowhere. "Voilà!" He certainly had the air of knowledge as he brought his fist down on the table to emphasise the point. Seeing I was interested he took a turn up and down the room, the very figure of suppressed energy.

"So I should imagine," said I.

"Wait until I have told you about their religious differences. Since the coming of the Hegira, the Kabyles have changed from Christianity and back seventeen times! A sort of puss-in-the-corner between the Cross and the Crescent. Ibn Khaldoun will tell you that Christianity was still a fighting force in the twelfth century. Hence we get this result: that whereas North Africa is the only land where the Crescent has utterly uprooted the Cross, at the same time it is the sole country where the Koranic law is not taken in its entirety by the faithful! A striking example of this lies in the marriage custom. The same race that treats a wife, unfaithful or not, with shocking heartlessness and often great cruelty, thinks it a meritorious act to marry a dancing-girl of the worst description. They are illogical, inconstant, untrustworthy in every way."

"Mon cher, monsieur," said I, "that is just another point to show how old are the uses of our modern civilisation."

"As a general rule, your native has only one wife at a time; more would be too expensive. He presents her with a dowry, which is returned, in the event of a divorce, to enable him to purchase another helpmeet. The lady in question, when given the 'sack,' returns to her family's bosom, there to wait until the husband desires to remarry her, or her relatives have found another lord and master for her.

"There are several varieties of divorce, after which the husband can take the woman back when he will; but if he insists on the final and decisive move, slippering the good lady across the mouth and calling her many unsavoury names, he cannot marry her again. At least, unless she has first passed through the hands of a third party. On such an occasion steps in the only active professional man in the whole of Algeria."

"Ah," said I, "I hope you do not refer to the tax-collector."

"God forbid!" replied my host. "Men of the type I refer to are known to the world as the professional Saint Joseph!"

When the aptness of the remark dawned upon me, I thought it would be interesting to know if a high standard of professional honour obtains amongst such gentry, and I put the question to my informant.

"Very fair, I believe, very fair!" he replied.

"You see, in case of doubt the husband acts with decision and promptitude. Dead men tell no tales."

In England such a state of affairs would have been ridiculous; in Africa it appeared so natural as to call for no comment.

"What has the lady to say in the matter?"

"Nothing! During the whole of her life she is never out of the control of her nearest male relative, who also controls her money should she be an heiress. He will argue for months over her dowry, occasionally giving evidence of his astuteness by selling her to some three or four suitors at once!"

He really was so keen, and said things with such feeling, that I could not help laughing.

"Then, of course," I said, "he decamps with the proceeds and leaves the favoured ones to settle the question between themselves as gentlemen should."

"Quite so. Truth to tell, everybody seems quite satisfied with the question except the woman, and she does not matter.

"The pity is that we can only pretend to interfere on one point. That is the marriage of very young children without their consent; but the 'djebr,' as it is called, appeals unfortunately too much to the native taste to be easily put down. Let us get out into the fresh air, and I will show you my oranges."

We lit up fresh cigarettes and strolled out into the sunshine. Down into the garden we wended our way, where my host was at haste to show me his orange trees of various kinds. He sent the native boy to walk up the trunk like a fly and pick the very finest of the ripe golden fruit for my benefit.

"Voilà, mon ami," said he, as he insisted on my taking a couple of dozen of the largest and most juicy, "voilà de quoi aroser le goulet ?"

How to dispose of them about the machine was more than I could see for the moment, but still I took them in the same spirit in which they were given, though it must have been the very spirit of Balaam's ass that compelled me to stop before some artichokes.

"Des artichots, vous voulez des artichots ! Mais, donc, à la bonheur ! Ça se mange cru."

Before I could enter a word of protest a good round dozen had found their way into my arms, which were beginning to ache with the burden. Yet I could see further trouble coming, for politeness made it difficult to refuse. So I made haste to get out of this Paradise, but my host gently restrained me by the arm.

"Look at those beautiful rose-trees," said he; "what a beautiful crop I am going to have next year. Stay, what do you think of my camphor ?"

The leaves were indeed fine, and I said so. Another error ! With sad, wearied eyes I saw the leaves gradually piling up on top of my mountain of fruit and vegetables. The situation was desperate, it required grasping with a firm hand if I was not to become a market porter. Yet delicacy was necessary. At last I hit upon the idea.

"Good gracious, my tyre's gone," I cried, and made a wild rush for the bike, cascading fruit on every side. My host and his henchman followed hot-foot.

As was only to be expected we found the machine perfectly safe and sound. My joy at getting out of this Ali Baba's cave was so great that I quite forgot to apologise for the utterly needless distress caused by my gratuitous lie. On the other hand, the garde was so sincere in his congratulations at my fortunate escape from—nothing, that it would have been inhuman of me to spoil his pleasure. We can so rarely rejoice at a friend's good fortune without some cause for envy that a man should think twice before he stops another's laughter.

As the hour of the siesta was now passed, it seemed to me that I heard the call of the road again; so I was for saying adieu to my host, who would have none of it.

When, however, my attitude became really firm, he sorrowfully consented, but insisted on accompanying me part of the way. He seemed quite depressed about my departure; and for my own part, too, I had quite taken to the good-hearted fellow.

"You really must come along next spring and have a little panther-shooting," said he, as we made desperate efforts to deck my machine with oranges in positions of stable equilibrium.

As fast as we piled the wretched things on, off they rolled, so that in sheer desperation I was reduced to eating the last two on the spot, whereat the man's face fairly beamed with delight through a halo of blue smoke that curled from his cigarette.

At last all was ready, we paid a final adieu to the Arab and the bottles in the kitchen.

CHAPTER XII

A LEAP IN THE DARK

ON to the machines we jumped and away up the road.

I forget how the conversation turned on Flammarion; even less do I remember how it was that the subject of tunnelling the earth cropped up, but from that, of course, the step was easy to road-making.

"If you want to see some really good roads," said my informant, "look at these." He was correct. We were now entering the gorges of Chabet-el-Akra, where mountains of five and six thousand feet seem to lean right over you.

For some seven kilometres the road is blasted and cut out of the living rock to form a ledge in the side of a precipice, so the cliff closes over your head like a roof. The valley gradually narrows in until from the road you look sheer down into the Oued Agrioun, whilst overhead tower peak on peak of three thousand feet and more in height. For seven kilometres the road runs thus; it is probably one of the finest examples of engineering in the world. Those seven kilometres of the road took seven years to cut, at a cost of seven million francs; about sixty-four thousand pounds to the mile. These are the famous monkey gorges.

"Look, look, there's an eagle!" said my guide, pointing over my head; and sure enough there was the great bird drifting slowly across the sky on outstretched pinions; a few moments later another followed.

"I hope," he went on, "that I shall have some monkeys to show you to-day. Time and again I have seen them crossing the road in troops, or sitting on the fence, scratching in a genial sort of way. I shall never forget one particular occasion when I was going quietly along, just as we are now. I passed quite a large troop of them about here. I had gone perhaps a kilometre further up the road when I saw a motor-car approaching.

"Then, monsieur, I was struck with an idea. I assure you that at times my ideas are of the most brilliant"—he cleared his throat. "Jumping off my machine, I stood in the road, directly in its path, and held up my hand. The automobile stopped. The owner got down, wondering what the matter was. Said I, 'Monsieur, descend here with your friends, and walk very gently down the road. You will find there a troop of monkeys, and I can promise you one of the finest sights of your life.' We stole along quietly and there they were, the little beggars, playing away like children. The motorists were most delighted, and expressed their thanks to me. But it was no more than my duty. I always think that an official ought to take a large view of his duties."

One glance at the intense seriousness of the man's face showed me conclusively that he meant every word he said. Here was a man who felt his position keenly, and took very great interest in it. His method of showing it may appear to the outsider a trifle bizarre, but it was very genuine nevertheless; and I ask you whether he was not the very man for his place.

I was very greatly strengthened in this conviction by his conduct with the natives, whom we now began to meet constantly on the way. Kerrata was holding its market, and the whole country-side had, in the nature of things, been in attendance. From the rider of the caparisoned mule to the ragamuffin who passed by at a loping trot, through all the varying degrees of squalid opulence surrounded by its bargains and servants, down through every rank of flea-bitten indigène (some Kabyles are very poor indeed), of ragged gandoura surrounded by limping goats—the very dregs of the market, right down till we reach the lowest rung of all—the local 'schnorrer,' the man who gets his livelihood by journeying from one feast to another, a large class, for the follower of Mahomet has a larger tolerance of the unbidden guest than we in our good Christian lands, my guide seemed to know everyone, or nearly so. He passed the time of day with a great delicacy of taste in the choice language that argued long and continued study of the native temperament. From a playful tap with the hunting-crop to a genial wave of the hand, all was as carefully graduated as the scale of Japanese honorifics. It seemed a very desirable thing to keep in with the garde-forestier.

Considering that, as he had told me himself, my companion had no active magisterial powers, this desire for notice aroused my curiosity, and I put a question to him.

"Why all this subservience?" I asked him, "since you say that the native respects nothing but force?"

"I have always my pen!" replied he, with a gentle smile.

A powerful sun beating down on the narrow gorge had made the rocks intensely hot; in so much so, that though the place itself was now in complete shadow, yet the heat radiated was almost intolerable. The perspiration was simply streaming off both of us; we called a halt for a breather and to watch the passers-by. One particularly emaciated giant attracted my attention.

"These people do not look as if they could stand much in the way of taxation," I remarked.

My garde blew several rings of smoke one through the other before he continued, with a shrug of his shoulders: "The fact is that most of these poor

CIGARETTES AND CUPS OF STICKY BLACK COFFEE

ROLLS OF MANCHESTER COTTONS

folks pay a double tax. No, it is not our fault," he added quickly, "it is just one of those that you cannot stop. . . . But perhaps I had better explain myself. It is this way, monsieur. We have in this country, and throughout North Africa, in fact, a large number of religious sects; and each of these sects serves to support an infinite number of missioners, collectors, and the like. You comprehend?"

I nodded in complete comprehension; the home parallel was too strong for there to be the slightest chance of misunderstanding.

"Will you believe me when I tell you that these same agents number some six thousand in Algeria alone; and that between them every year they manage to lay hold of some *seven million francs!* . . . Yes, it does make one whistle, does it not? Does that account for some of the rags? I think you will agree with me that it does."

Like a wise man, my companion said no more. Religious freedom brings more in its train than the mere right to sing with that particular snuffle which one regards as being most pleasing to the Almighty.

For a little time we smoked in silence, each buried in his own thought. I would have given a good deal to have the exact thoughts of any one of the now occasional natives that passed us.

A slight chilliness of the air reminded me that time was getting on; before very long the gorge would be just as bitterly cold as it had been hot a few hours before; there was also the coming darkness to consider. It behoved me to move ahead. Much as I disliked leaving my genial friend the inevitable had to be performed. He had already conducted me many a long kilometre of my way. To encroach on his kindness would have been unthinkable.

Tears came into the good fellow's eyes when I told him of my intention. We had so fraternised that I did not feel quite happy myself. We had really got on very well together indeed and, though he pressed me very much to pass that way again before I left the country, we both felt that there was but small probability of our ever meeting again.

"Eh bien," said he, "tout passe! It is curious that this should be our parting-place. Look at that stone on the other side of the river."

Following his finger with my eyes, I saw an inscription cut in the face of the huge rock opposite:

LES PREMIERS SOLDATS QUI
PASSERENT SUR CES RIVES
FURENT DES TIRAILLEURS
COMMANDES PAR M. LE
COMMANDANT DESMAISONS
7 APRIL 1864.

"You can reckon yourself amongst their glorious company," he said. "You are the first of my acquaintances who has thought it worth while to cross Algeria à bicyclette."

IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD LOOKING AFTER ME

We both laughed heartily at the idea, and I seized the opportunity to shake him warmly by the hand, jump on my machine, and pedal up the road. Looking behind, when I reached the turning, I saw him standing in the middle of the road looking after me. I waved my hand and he answered; then he mounted, and rode slowly down the hill.

. . . . . .

By the time I reached Kerrata it was fairly late, for the remainder of the gorge was really so very fine that I did not hurry. Nevertheless, when I reached my 'gîte' I was distinctly ready for all the place could provide in the way of refreshment. So I celebrated my arrival by taking the local native lawyer for the barman, and asking him for a drink!

The most accurate way to describe Kerrata is to say that it is a place that comes between Bougie and Sétif. If we leave it at that, what need is there to discourse on the general squalor of the hotel and the dilapidation of the town, of the rapacity of the inhabitants and their appalling fund of misinformation.

I spent the whole evening in learning that there were two roads to Sétif: the direct one which meant a long climb of some forty kilometres up a steep ramp; and the indirect one, which made a gentle detour of about an extra twenty kilometres up a very much easier and rideable gradient.

When I started again there was a heavy Scotch mist falling, so I slung on my capote. As I mounted at the hotel door the boots shouted in my ears:

"Prendre à droit à Mérouah!"

I fancy that at some time or other of their lives everybody has a premonition that all is not well, that there is a screw loose in the machinery somewhere, in other words that Providence or the Devil is fixing up a nice little bit of trouble ahead. So it was with me.

For a kilometre or two out of Kerrata there was a very nice spin downhill, which carried me completely out of the shower; but alas and alack! I was soon to learn that passing showers leave their moisture behind.

Some seven kilometres along the road, I came to the famous bifurcation, and then I had to decide whether I would trust to my own judgment and go straight ahead up the hill, regardless of subsequent hills and dales, or whether I would take the advice of the oldest inhabitant and turn down to the right along a fascinatingly level road.

I regret to say that a mixture of laziness and a regard for the advice of my elders, that I have always found a most serious handicap in life, won the day. I took the turning to the right, and thereby brought upon myself one of the hardest day's work it has ever been my misfortune to have thrust upon me.

Now the main road was of a beautiful macadam surface, hard and very well drained. Unfortunately the same could not be said of the road I followed.

It was of a very local manufacture, and if it had ever heard of Mr. Macadam, it must have forgotten all about him very long ago indeed; so that, under ordinary circumstances, it must have been covered with a very thick layer of dust. Note also that the valley through which it ran was of the most utterly barren and desolate description. Not even a native village! Nothing but one or two very tumble-down homesteads in the whole mileage of its extent. It looked just as mournful as Wastdale, without the sad beauty of black Wastwater to carry it off. But still, no doubt I should have negotiated it all right and with a certain amount of interest had it not been for one thing—Mud! Mud! Mud!!!

The slight shower had just lasted long enough to turn the dust into a putty-like mixture that clogged the wheels far worse than sand.

The mud was not of that thin, splashing variety, that slops about and leaves the wheel fairly clean; on the contrary, it was of a gritty, sticky consistency, that clung to the wheel in layers, like a mixture of glue and sand, so that every twenty yards or so I had to clean the wheels in order that they might be persuaded to pass through the forks. It will be understood, I think, that under these circumstances progress was on the slow side. Before I had gone three hundred yards I left off attempting to ride, and walked. At this juncture, of course, a wise man would have given the thing up as a bad job and returned to the high road. Not so with me; the infernal devil of hope kept egging me on with a suggestion that things would be ever so much better round the corner a few yards ahead. So I kept on, my temper getting worse at every step, until eventually it became absolutely foul.

This was the very moment reserved wherein I might discover that I had left my water-bottle behind at the inn!

At the mere thought of such a catastrophe I got horribly thirsty. With every step the scenery got more wretched; a monotonously level road running at the foot of some bare hills for about forty miles, on the other side of the valley still more wretched, dirty-looking hills, whilst down the centre of this natural gutter ran the tiniest trickle of brackish water, thus completing the resemblance to a drain.

Until I had covered the first twenty miles I do not recollect one single hovel or human being. All this going was very hard showing too, so that it is to be imagined I was somewhat fatigued by the time I reached the half-way mark. Here, at any rate, I found a straggling, tumble-down farm belonging probably to a well-to-do native. At all events there was a farm-hand in overalls who could understand a few words of French, which was a relief and to be counted unto him for virtue.

One very desirable event resulted from his erudition; he pointed out where the local pump was, and I was not long in reaching it. I then lunched frugally off an orange and a stick of chocolate.

As if in earnest that all my troubles were at an end, the sun now came out and began to dry things up a bit.

As I sat on a heap of stones and tried to engage the man in conversation a huge lumbering waggon passed by, coming from Aïn Roua ; it had seven horses in team. Now, at any rate, I thought, I shall be able to get along ; I could ride in the ruts. The farm-hand was frankly uncommunicative, and in answer to a question regretted that his knowledge of bicycles was not great enough to permit him giving me a hand in the cleaning thereof.

By this time two little goat-herds had arrived upon the scene ; they had started crossing the valley the moment I stopped, to see what the strange creature was that took such an out-of-the-way road. They must have been deeply impressed, for they stood stock still for quite ten minutes before one began to scratch himself. I think it was this display of energy that set me thinking it was time to be off again. However that may be, I incontinently got up and began to scrape the more hopelessly clogged parts of the machine with a stick. Then a miracle happened.

The two youths actually came over to the machine and began to give it a rub with their gandoura ! I was really so taken aback that my jaw dropped. I looked at the man in overalls for an explanation. He walked over the road to lean up against the bank at my side, and opened his mouth to speak—which was a pity. The double effort was too much for him, and his mouth closed again of its own accord. Never a word was said. So we proceeded in silence.

When at last the job was done, I pulled out some cigarettes and handed the packet to the elder boy that he should help himself, upon which he grabbed the lot. I rescued the cigarettes with difficulty and divided the spoil fairly between them. Still no word from the silent man.

" How many kilometres is it to Aïn Roua ? " I asked him in desperation. He shook his head in silence. The elder boy held up five fingers. I asked him again, for the thing was unbelievable. This time he held up six fingers. Again I put the question to the lad. Now he held up seven fingers.

" Good Lord ! " said I to myself, " I'd better be off. If I stay here long enough I shan't catch the confounded place till I get to Biskra."

Happily it was on a comparatively dry road that I now got awheel, so the kilometres rolled behind me with sufficient ease. After half an hour's run the valley began to close in and the scenery lost some of its monotony, but still it remained as destitute of inhabitants as before.

I now began to climb a bit. I suppose the previous mud-shoving had taken the stuffing out of me, for I found the easy gradient quite unduly fatiguing.

At last, round a bend of the valley, I saw a village, clinging to the end of a hill on the other side.

" That must be Aïn Roua," was the impression that flashed across me. I could feel it in my legs. I came upon a man breaking stones by the roadside, and asked him. He nodded.

It took me about an hour to climb that hill. As I trudged up the last slope that leads you into the village square, I took out my watch. It read just two o'clock! Six and a half hours to cover sixty kilometres!

And Sétif to be reached by nightfall!

Not by me!

Aïn Roua consists of some score or so of tumbledown, dirty, one-storeyed houses surrounding an empty water-gullied Place, on one side of which is the smithy facing a tiny inn on the other. The houses are, without exception, hovels; and the inn is little better. But the good patronne and her sister made up in warmth of welcome for any little shortcomings in the matter of electric lifts and the like.

I ate a very hearty lunch of tough goat's flesh, accompanied by a light herb omelette, washing the whole down with a little red wine, whilst I passed the time of day with another guest, a fair-haired man of about thirty. It so turned out that he was going my way next day. This was the final argument needed to keep me in Aïn Roua for the night.

My new acquaintance, it appeared, was a 'garçon de café' from Sétif. As he showed me my chamber, to which the only approach lay through his own, he became communicative.

"Tiens, tiens! monsieur est anglais. One but rarely sees your countrymen about here. Myself, I was born at Biskra. I have been all over Algeria and Tunisia on a bicycle, often sleeping in the cafés maures, but never have I been abroad."

"I suppose there really are very few tourists round this part of the world."

"En effet! The few Englishmen one hears of are either in the halfa trade, or else Protestant missionaries amongst the natives." So saying, he gave me a sharp look, which puzzled me for the moment. Surely he could not take me for a Methodist missionary? I think many good people at home would have a fit if they knew that the average Algerian honestly believes the poor, hard-working, honest, if somewhat tactless Methody minister, to be a crafty spy in the employ of the British Government!

It must have been my expression that cleared me in the man's mind, for he shortly resumed his tale.

"It is pleasant to meet someone who likes travel as much as I do. At eleven years of age I left Biskra to go into the hotel business at Sétif; at eighteen I was married. When my wife died, I took up bicycling. Now I run over here every week-end. Mind you close your shutters on leaving," said he, as he flung open the lattice. "There are many natives about and the 'béchara' is very popular."

"The what?" I asked.

"Don't you know the 'béchara'? I must explain. It is one of the most impudent forms of theft that you can possibly imagine."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PIPES OF PAN

THE Algerian sat down on the only chair by the side of the broken washstand; and I climbed on to the huge old-fashioned mattress, topped by the enormous eiderdown—that eiderdown that is the inevitable accompaniment of every French bedroom from the Elysée Palace Hotel to the hôtels meublés of the Rue de l'Abbé Grégoire.

"The method of the béchara is this," said my informant. "You or I have a particularly fine bullock or object of some description that we value highly. Of course, everybody knows about it. One fine day or night the thing disappears. It has been stolen. We can inform the commissary—and never see our bullock again; or we can sit down and wait. Probably we do the latter. Sooner or later a Kabyle, maybe a man of standing, comes up to us and says, 'Thou wantest the animal again?' 'Yes!' we reply in chorus. 'Then give me so many francs and it shall be returned to you,' is his reply. We pay up cheerfully, knowing all the time that it is the very man himself, or a relation, who has stolen our property and hidden it away. On the other hand, to tell the police would be worse than useless, so closely do the natives stick together where there is any money to be got."

"How extraordinary! But, surely they would never dare to practise the trick on anyone of importance!" He smiled.

"They once took the cross of Cardinal Lavigerie!"

One could but marvel, and consider how easily East meets West when thieving is concerned, as anyone who has lost a valuable terrier can well point out!

"But, surely, tell me, are the police any good?" I asked.

"Mon cher, monsieur, the administrator of the 'commune mixte' is quite a good man in general. He knows the native and he knows the colonist; hence, he is more apt to give you advice that keeps the peace rather than pursue an investigation to the bitter end. Everybody complains of him, everybody trusts him and makes use of him."

"That is the way of this wicked world," I replied. "I suppose he does not get a very rosy time of it."

My friend's eyes hardened at the word.

"Father was one," said he, "and I know. Algeria is no school for luxury and ease, I can tell you. The spirit of the ordinary official of to-day who does his duty is like that of a crusader! . . . It is the high official who brings all the trouble. I am a social democrat, and I know what I am saying." His voice rose in crescendo, and he beat upon the battered washstand with clenched fist. A burnt-out cigarette stuck to his lower lip. It wagged and followed the expression of the mobile mouth in every shade of meaning. "Not one of them will stay in the place; they no sooner come than they are off again. But we'll change all that when we proclaim the Republic of Algeria."

"I say, you're getting on apace!" I felt bound to say this, though, of course, you can always hear the same sort of talk in any bar in Montreal or Toronto if you listen for it. At the moment I was feeling far more alarmed for the crockery than for the safety of the French Empire. But I had only added fuel to the raging furnace; the cigarette-end wagged in frenzy.

"Getting on! I should think we are getting on. How long do you think we are going to stand the insolence and contempt with which our deputies are treated in Paris? How long do you think we are going to stand the jokes they make at the expense of our mayors? Are not our mayors as good and better and more honest than ninety-nine out of a hundred in France? Answer me that! Ah, yes; you sit there cold and stolid like the Englishman that you are; but I tell you that we Algerians have spirit. We are the neo-français; it is we who are going to regenerate the French nation. I tell you we will not stand this fooling."

It needed no great acquaintance with the laws of mechanics to see that the washstand could really only stand two or three more earnest thumps, so I joined the great tribe of ‘beni Oui-oui,’ as they are called, and acted like the native councillors do; I agreed with my Algerian friend on all points. The great thing was to lead him back to the gentler paths of foreign delinquency.

“Certainly, certainly,” said I; “but do you think that you colonists have amalgamated sufficiently well with the Italians and Spaniards for there to be a really strong nation when you take this step?”

No sooner had I uttered the words than I regretted it. I had evidently touched on one of his strong points. That fist came down upon the devoted stand with an aim as sure as it was unfortunate. There was a rousing crash as the top flew off, and the whole came cascading on to the floor. Even a social democrat finds it hard to stand against domestic disaster. The neo-français Algerian Republican rose to his feet, and we gazed helplessly at each other amongst the ruins.

“Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Qu’est-ce que j’ai fait! La pauvre dame!” Tears dropped from the little fellow’s eyes as we stooped to collect the fragments. This bloodthirsty revolutionist was at heart just as soft as the rest of us. To lose but a basin, a ewer even, means more than a little in a tiny inn of the Aurès.

Unhappily, the accident seemed to cast quite a gloom over us until the green-hour. Few breakages, however, will stand the strain of a vermouth or two, so that by the time the potage was on the table we were carrying on a most outrageous flirtation with the daughter of the post-master, who happened to come in for a litre of wine.

It was on Thursday, if I remember rightly, that my friend and I left Aïn Roua. A fine, bright, crisp day, and a good road, all downhill after the first few kilometres. Going was very good, though windy in places, and our travelling was even better, lightened as it was by the pleasant chatter of my companion, who seemed to know every inch of the way. As we whizzed past native gourbis we scattered dozens of sleeping dogs, who retaliated with snaps at our ankles that brought them one or two hearty kicks in the jaw. We nearly ran down a man riding a camel.

My friend told me that he had tried business in Bizerta, but things were the reverse of good since the garrison had been reduced, wherefore his return to Sétif. Conversation led on, in the natural course of events, to a discussion of the general wealth of the department of Constantine.

From the broken bare ground we were passing as we spun down the flank of the range, it seemed impossible to believe that we should ever come across such rich soil as would make Sétif the granary of the country, yet my companion assured me that it was so on the other side of the hills.

Every now and then we would pass a herdsman with his flocks, or a few Kabyles breaking the hard ground in a hopeless sort of way with a mattock, or occasionally, perhaps, a 'chemma,' as the professional guest is called. Nothing but bare, arid, rock-strewn wastes.

"Funny, isn't it?" said the Algerian, à propos of nothing in particular, "that these same wretched creatures should still hang on so desperately to their tribal customs as to endeavour, even now, to submit all their disputes to the tribal council, the 'djemaa.'"

"Anyone who knows lawyers can quite understand that point of view," I replied.

He roared out laughing:

"Quite right, quite right. As it is, the native is skinned like an eel, whenever possible, by everyone, from the caid down to the 'chaoukh' (lawyer's tout).

"The caid delivers justice wherever and whenever he may. He frankly and openly accepts bribes. Said one of them once to a deputy who remonstrated: 'At any rate, I am only paid by the winners!' On the other hand, the French magistrate does not, of course, accept bribes, but then he is, on occasion, deceived, which the caid never is.

"Une petite histoire! There was once a Kabyle who was being sued for a debt. People asked him why he had no witnesses for the defence. 'What is the use?' said he. 'Suppose I bring ten witnesses, he will bring twenty. Much better let him have his way and deliver his evidence. I will easily destroy that.'"

"After that I think we may safely leave him to his djemaa."

We had covered quite a lot of ground before either of us made another remark, than a point struck me.

"Don't you find these councils rather a source of unrest ?" I asked.

"Probably! But then the 'amin,' the president, is nominated by the Government—and there is always the minority. That minority knows which side its bread is buttered. It is a particularly powerful minority. In the old days it was always sure of bringing the other side to a reasonable compromise by the threat of civil war, and the memory of it holds them to this day."

Like the Kabyle minority, I acted as a drag on the energies of my friend. He was a great hand at riding uphill, and gloried in showing me a clean pair of heels whenever we did any climbing. But what I lost on the swings I made up on the roundabouts, for downhill the superior weight of my machine and its load carried me shooting past him. So that when we came to the thirty-kilometre descent that brings you down into Sétif I was well up with him, and we began to travel.

We covered the last twenty-five kilometres in three-quarters of an hour; probably we should have cut a bit off that had it not been for the rise that has to be breasted as you approach the Bougie Gate.

Sétif is largely a garrison town, so it was all in keeping and very proper that we should meet a gallant general and his 'aide' out for a morning ride to escort an extremely pretty little lady who sat her grey Arab as if she were moulded to it. It was an encouraging sight, and led one to hope the best of modern Sittifis.

There is a sort of business-like air about Sétif that is extremely satisfying. It is walled all round, and the walls have nice loopholes, wherefrom one may shoot down upon advancing attackers with considerable discomfort to them but almost perfect safety to oneself. How nicely and how neatly the streets run at right angles to each other, so pleasantly bordered with trees. You find shops of quite a respectable nature, and houses that look as if they had been built to live in—not merely for the benefit of the nomadic artist. Consequently, you feel entirely satisfied with the place. No base feeling compels you to rush round every minute and buy a picture post-card; hence a vast saving in time and money, and good catering for its six or seven thousand inhabitants and garrison of three thousand troops.

About two out of every three men you meet in the street are soldiers of the Zouaves, the Chasseurs, or some Metropolitan corps. To those of an enquiring mind the time is an excellent one for learning to distinguish the different regiments.

At one period of its career Sétif was called Sittifis, and was occupied by the Romans, as the capital of the province of Sittifian Mauretania. It was later on thoroughly destroyed by the Vandals and the Arabs. Indeed, you will now have difficulty in discovering traces of the three miles circuit of the ancient walls.

I spent no time hunting after Roman remains, but just hurried off to a building of later period—the telegraph office—and wired for my bottle. I then proceeded to the railway station, which was also presumably non-existent in Roman times.

At the station I sorted out my luggage and footed the usual bill. It was rather funny to see how every now and then one of the clerks would stroll into the 'consigne' to see that I was not tampering with anything. Yet everybody was obliging, and as no one actually called me a thief, the visit might be considered a distinct success, I suppose.

Owing to the short twilight in this part of the world, it is not much good trying to explore after dinner unless one happily lights upon a theatre. Such was my good fortune at Sétif. To this reason, and to this alone, I would ask the reader to assign my visit to the performance of *Sursis*. I can assure him it was due to no active spirit of ungodliness.

For the benefit of the ignorant, I may say that *Sursis* is a military play. As may well be imagined from its environment, it is full of local colour. Further I will not go, as I do sincerely hope that people of all ages and sexes will read this book.

My extremely early arrival at the theatre was due to an expectation that the play would start within at least half an hour of the appointed time. Of course I had counted without the African air. Half an hour after curtain-time there were perhaps a dozen people in the theatre; the audience was really only just beginning to come in. I began to wish that I had stayed for another game of dominoes and another café. By the time the theatre was half full I began to get fidgety. Suddenly the atmosphere underwent a subtle change, and I knew that all was well. What the matter was I could not for a moment determine, until a glance to my right showed a small boy at the side of the orchestra. There was a goodly look about that boy for some reason or other. I determined to keep my eye upon him—and with reason.

His mother adjured him to return to his seat and be quiet. That was the 'alerte.'

From the semi-obscurity at his elbow surged another small boy, like unto the first but more minute. Together they entered the orchestra. The commander-in-chief of this small army took in the lie of the ground as he climbed on the conductor's stool; very thoroughly he observed it too. When from his coign of vantage he proceeded to discuss the outward appearance and moral capabilities of everyone in the theatre! His knowledge of their vices, to say nothing of their virtues, was as colossal as it was varied, and it was conveyed in no uncertain note to the trembling audience. He waved airily to an actor who peeped round the curtain. He successfully eluded his mother amidst the crashing of orchestral stools. What would have happened eventually it is rather difficult to say, but at that moment the attendants entered. They formed a cordon round him and, alas, he was ejected, screaming, faithfully followed by his henchman. An actor peered round the curtain, waved his hat to someone in the orchestra, then up went the curtain. But for me, with the exit of the boy the play was finished. As I said before, the play is by no means intended for the unsophisticated, but what author can make his hearers blush with such perfect ease as a well-informed small boy ? I sincerely hope that precocity will outwear the parental hand.

In general I was so well treated in the wayside hostels that it gives me absolute pleasure to be able at last to say a bad word for one of them. I will proceed.

In the morning I discovered that though there had been no attempt to clean my boots, there had been a very distinct effort to open my window ; quite in the ordinary course, I reported the little matter to the patron and I am pleased to say that he took notice of it. For I had the stiffest bill during the whole of my sojourn in Algeria ; on the principle, presumably, that any man who is rich enough to attract thieves ought certainly to pay for his escape.

Fortunately, my water-bottle arrived by diligence in the early hours of the morning, so I could get off in time to make some fifty kilometres to Ampère for lunch.

Of the run to Ampère there is very little to be said, except that the road is monotonous and level, but good. You traverse immense fields of corn and barley—potential barley, in my case. Though in all probability the return is large, yet the whole cultivation is apparently very superficial. You are constantly told that all manner of methods are in use for increasing the output; in so much so, that on many sides it is proclaimed that the farmers are practically living on their capital, that all the nourishment is being taken out of the ground at an appalling rate.

For the life of me I cannot understand why, if the business and returns are as good as the enthusiasts proclaim, there are not more Europeans in the line. As a matter of fact, by far the greater part of the cereal farming lies in the hands of the native.

Is it that nothing below the vine is considered sufficiently aristocratic for the 'colon'? Or is it due, as some folks say, to the difficulty of obtaining native labour cheap enough to make the game a paying one? Modern progress in the region of Sétif does not extend to reaping-machines, so that all reaping has to be done after the fashion of Ruth and Boaz. I think that I am correct in stating that Ruth demanded of the elderly Mr. Boaz a certain return for her labour in terms of corn, trusting that time and good fortune would entitle her to trade-union wages. I have heard it stated that, where native labour is concerned in conjunction with a roumi farmer, people frequently take their wages in advance when the farmer's back is turned. Multiply this by several hundreds and you will understand why the Infidel keeps clear of cereal farming. But good business in sorgho and beans is done.

What is a very terrible set-back to such prosperity as does exist on these Hauts Plateaux, as they are called, is the awful winter, that kills like a destroying angel. Man, beast, crop, and all go down before the terrible cold, the fearful winds, and the deep snow. Equally pitiful, or more so, is the sad story of the flocks in these bitter regions. In bad seasons the sheep die by the hundred thousand. Yet those that survive are, together with their masters, pressed back and yet further back to still more arid regions as commercial needs demand.

"Refouler les arabes! Jamais de la vie! We never herd them together in reservations like the English! . . . We merely colonise officially." Such is the eternal cry—and yet the nomads, with their flocks, get pressed ever back, to die of slow starvation. Of course it is nobody's fault; the old campaign of crop-raising against stock-raising. But men who ought to know say that, given free rein, the bestial would form the richest product of this sorely-tried land.

On the far horizon are the mountains of the Hodna. What very delicate tints they assume in the morning! One always seems to have the wind in one's face, and

NOMADS ENCAMPED AT THE FOOT OF THE HODNA MOUNTAINS

on it comes drifting down the music of the pipes of Pan. These wind-swept plateaux, bounded by bare mud-coloured hills, are the very kingdom of the Goat-God.

Where you pass close to some jutting spur of the hills, the lacustrine formation stands out very clear. There is, indeed, the remains of a small lake close by Ampère; all the soil seems very sandy.

Under certain effects of light and atmosphere, the mountains begin to take on that flesh-colour that so strikes one further south, whilst the shadows darken to a deep green and exquisite purple.

Should you happen to come upon Ampère on a market-day, you will pass hosts of sheep with their ragged little attendants playing as they go upon the double flute. The Arab market was in full swing when I got into the town at about eleven o'clock. It was the first time I had ever seen the genuine article, and at that there is no wonder because it is here that the racial division occurs. One leaves the Kabyle behind for good, and in his place one takes to one's bosom that innocent child of nature, the hook-nosed Arab, with the narrow forehead and hawk-eye. Here it was, also, that I first made acquaintance with the camel caravan, whereby the Arab transports the whole of his worldly wealth, not excluding the ladies. Even so far north the caravan may well consist of thirty to forty camels; in some of the trans-saharian ones down south, I believe, you may count ten times as many.

What strikes one very markedly is the manner in which they travel in detachments, one detachment several hundred yards behind the other, with a view to minimising the dust; a very necessary precaution even on the well-metalled roads that the French have laid down; how much more so on the wind-dried stretches of the desert. But they do look odd as they go swinging along, bobbing their necks and flopping their ungainly feet under huge, unwieldy, packs, and seemingly quite oblivious to resounding thwacks bestowed on their dusty, tufted, coats by the long 'touggourt' sticks of the drivers. By the way, you have no idea how an Arab can stride out until you see him speeding up his camels.

What a very different appearance the road must have borne some forty years ago, before the Mokrani rising, which led to the building of these roads. I was talking to an old colonel of Chasseurs at Biskra. He told me that the first time he made the journey from Sétif to Batna was on horseback; then, the only way you knew your road was by the bleaching bones of those who had fallen in their tracks to die.

CHAPTER XIV

ACROSS THE PLAINS

DÉJEUNER at Ampère was one of those delightful hail-fellow-well-met little affairs that are the delight of the road and the horror of every truly British traveller. We all sat at a long table of bare but spotlessly clean boards. Most of us wore overalls.

I had the good fortune to sit next a "what-the-hell" type of bagman, who divided his time between trying to make the patronne blush and pumping me as to my business. At last he could stand the strain on his curiosity no longer.

" Monsieur est voyageur ? "

" Ma foi, oui ! " I replied.

" Moi, je voyage en vins. Et vous ? "

" Moi—en plaisir." The table roared ; though the French was as bad as it was effective in silencing him. After that I was permitted to hear the Moroccan experiences of the little tailor on my right, whilst the landlord expatiated on his cycling records between mouthfuls of raw artichoke. But we were all a very cheery, though waistcoatless, company. I am pleased to say I tasted a native liqueur of peculiar excellence, but of which I forget the name. There was a subtlety about the flavour which kept me to my seat until the passing of a great grey car in a cloud of dust brought us all to the door. How calmly the Moslem takes this latest vagary of the crazy West! In the environs of Algiers there are one or two Moors, even, who are themselves entrapped by Sheitan. They go careering about the country in a manner that, in the old days, would have brought them to the executioner's knife in as short a time as they now take to cover a measured mile.

Even the corpse of a belated chicken in the track of the smelling horror failed to arouse the ire of anyone but its owner. After such an exhibition of placidity I resolved to continue my investigations in the market; so I loafed down the main street, through the elbowing crowd of white burnouses, every now and then picked out by the spotless raiment, red boots, and swaggering gait of some big-bearded caid. From time to time I would stop to read the proclamation in French and Arabic in the 'place,' or loiter outside the open doors of these curious one-storeyed windowless native shops, to admire the high-saddled horses and mules waiting their masters' pleasure; or perhaps watch the aforesaid masters sit squatting on their haunches round some tree holding the bridle with one hand, and with the other puffing at the fag-end of a cigarette. At last, to the tune of the guttural rasping Arabic, I came to the fenced-in market-place, with its rows of tents, its kneeling camels, its lines of tethered, sore-backed, mules. Outside the entrance were dozens of vehicles and diligences that had come in for the day from the outlying districts.

Merchandise in every shape or form you can purchase from the grey-bearded patriarchs you see haggling over the tenth part of a penny. But all the world must be prepared to negotiate with due decorum under the shade of a tent to the accompaniment of cigarettes and cups of sticky black coffee.

What strikes the wandering Anglo-Saxon as much as anything are the lines upon lines of rolls of Manchester cottons. There they lie, marshalled outside the owner's tent, blazing almost in the sun with their variety of colour. Put the old dealer himself into a frock-coat in the place of his snow-white cloak and he would be the very spit of a Lancashire spinner of the older generation. A veritable Cottonopolis of the 'bled.'

Further down the lane of tents you come upon a native jeweller delicately pointing some bracelet, or transgressing the laws of God, nay! of Mammon too, by his shameless dealing with the precious metals entrusted to his care; though the close proximity of a caid, dispensing Turkish justice in the open, may possibly keep him fairly in the straight and narrow way for the time being.

Our friend the jeweller is generally a Hebrew, and has but an indifferent reputation for honesty in the 'bled.' He has various means for duly increasing the legitimate profits of his trade. One of them is as follows:—

When the Arab, not the Kabyle (who knows a thing or two), brings him some gold—generally twenty-franc pieces—to make into a necklace for the latest addition to his harem, our friend the jeweller accepts the job with the greatest alacrity. He makes a very excellent necklace, which is worn for many years by the lady in question, to the general annoyance of her friends and the despair of her enemies. One unhappy season the frost blights the lord's crops, his flocks die by the hundred. He is reduced to extremities; he has to sell up; his wives fare in the general débâcle. The great necklace has to go! It goes to the local pawnbroker.

It is then found that the necklace has a core of lead! That it is no more, indeed, than lead more or less heavily gilt. Happily for himself the 'youtre,' the 'youpin,' the Jew, is by then many a long kilometre from the scene of his harvest. Rest his ribs in peace! Otherwise he might make a too intimate acquaintance with the 'matracque' or the 'bistouri.' A split head or a severed gullet are powerful antidotes to theft, for none too many questions are asked in the hinterland of the Hauts Plateaux when a rude native justice has had its way.

I do not believe, however, that even the Jew has as yet fully grasped all the possibilities for usury that exist in this thriftless land. But let me explain. A paternal Government has created land-banks for the Arab farmer called 'silos,' for which his unwilling contribution is extracted by the simple method of taxing the worthy man. When the 'disette' or lean year comes along and famine stalks abroad in the land, the bank will pay him out in cash, goods, or seed, of course, at a reasonable rate of interest. This was the first point that struck our friend, the Kabyle, when he considered the scheme in all its bearings. He now operates thus:—

In his capacity of small farmer, this native financier proceeds to take advantage of the bank's good-will, and to borrow as much money as he possibly can. Then, does he use it for the full development of his land? No! Much better than that. He lends it to his less intelligent brethren at a higher rate of interest; at a truly Eastern rate of interest!

So things are again properly balanced up and the confounded European notions of equity do not do as much damage to the Koranic mind as they might do.

These 'silos' are simply one development of a general scheme to protect the Arab from himself. Another is the fine system for dealing with "famine" areas, whereby the really needy ones get the help and the "spongers" get the boot. Strange to say, the marabouts have taken quite kindly to the roumi charity for their unfortunate flocks. It may be that the reason lies in the great saving to be made in the saint's own purse.

Again, the marabout has but little to say against the dispensaries and native hospitals—for probably the same reason. In so acting he, willy-nilly, performs a considerable kindness towards his co-religionists, for though the local surgeons may not all be the equal of Pasteur or Lister, yet they have been known to effect a cure where the blackest of witchcraft has failed.

Sunset on the hills is of a deep purple, indeed, very beautiful; but the changing shadows come quickly on, like the lightning moods of this strange land, and you can scarcely say that the twilight is upon you before it is past. Then, lo and behold! lights begin to twinkle in the few windows that are not shuttered up for the night, and the air begins to breathe upon you clear and chill, so that you press the pace as you hurry along. The streets clear of man and beast; even the pub empties of all save the patron, the chemist, and a crony playing a round of manille in a corner. All is quiet save the lilting tinkle-tinkle of some distant mandoline. So I think of early hours and discreetly retire through the courtyard and up the outside staircase that leads directly to my room.

From red-roofed Ampère to Corneille the road becomes more undulating, though not more interesting for all that. One is crossing the spurs of the Hodna range—which have but the picturesque feature and freshness of dry mud. The plain, with its sparse herbage, is but little better. Flocks and farms alike are rare. One is really thankful for the slight shower that comes along to break the monotony of this dreary route. At any rate, there is something weird and effective to observe in the patches of strong sunlight striking across the heavy clouds.

A little beyond Ras-el-Aioun you strike down to the left. It is the only incident of note you are likely to meet with during the day, after which there is now nothing left for you to do until you get to Corneille but marvel at the consistent excellence of the roads. Perhaps, if you are lucky, you may meet a herdsman, with his beasts, round the bend of some jutting spur; and note the politeness with which he aids you to pass his charges in safety. One herdsman, and perhaps a chemma—that is the average of traffic in the thirty-odd miles that lie between Ampère and Corneille. Make the most of it while you may.

When you draw near to Corneille, red-roofed like its sister, you are approaching the slopes of the Mountains of Batna—very fine they look too. It is across these hills that your road lies. You have to cross the highest pass of the route before the long run down to the Sahara begins.

If you have any Scotch blood in your veins, at this moment it takes the firm ascendant—and you go cannily. You determine to push on to Bernelle right at the foot of the mountains, and leave the sweating climbs until next day.

As, however, Bernelle is purely and frankly a mean hamlet, whilst pretty Cornelle is a "centre of colonisation," with a more pretentious inn, to say nothing of an embryo garden on the centre, which, doubtless, in the near future will be very lovely with its palms and cacti, you decide to walk delicately, like Agag. So you stop there for déjeuner. A glance at the daughter of the house decides you to increase your menu by several small dishes that necessitate her frequent appearance upon the scene ; a waste of money if you will, but assuredly a pleasant one, if only to see the pure ivory of her skin and her jet-black hair.

From the little lady in question one learns that most of the population is white.

" C'est rare, monsieur, que l'on voit quelqu'un de passage. Nous sommes bien loin du monde."

" Mademoiselle voudrait bien faire le tour de Paris ? "

" Ah la-la ! Si je veux ! Voir les toilettes, les courses, les théatres . . ." The girl clapped her hands in glee at the very thought.

There are times when it is advisable to seek the fresh air. I did so. As a rule I am not what you would call fatalistic ; but for me there is a horrible dread about the number three. Probably a cold calculation might show me that the number three was no more dangerous than any other one. But there was that spasm of the Gainsborough at Sétif ; there was. . . . At any rate, I got out into the air. After all, the main object of my existence for the moment was to get to Biskra. . . ! I do not like the number three.

As regards her information about the preponderance of whites at Corneille the young lady was quite correct. For it happens to be one of those places where the colonial idea is to be trained to shoot. All the attractions of the season, and so forth. The problem of luring the settler out into the wilds has always appeared a tough one to the logical French mind. The colon is not to be left to himself in our happy-go-lucky way; mais non! If his past be not enquired into, at any rate his future must be. So that first a town is projected, then its amusements, then a method of securing the colonists. Of the last, one of the latest, and I certainly think the most brilliant, ideas is that the ground should first be broken by convict labour. It would undoubtedly be a healthy, a useful, and an instructive life for the convicts; one, in fact, in which they would not fail to take an interest. Vide the use of the 'joyeux' in the Timgad excavations, of which we shall take note further on. So far so good. But when it comes to the instructive effect of such proposed civilised agricultural methods on the native, about which people will talk at length and with heat round the café tables in Algiers, one begins to pause and consider.

Bernelle being but some eight kilometres beyond Corneille, a natural desire to save work for the next day compelled me to push on.

As I said before, Bernelle is of the mean, mean; it is also of the dirty, dirty. It is, in short, extremely colonial. One straggling street of low houses with shutters hanging by a single hinge and rusty old hoop-iron in the by-ways. However, it too has its 'jardin'! So let us not utterly condemn the place but get on to the inn, which is also, if I remember rightly, the general store.

Patriarchal rule still holds sway in this part of the land; or was it that his daughters-in-law had great expectations from the old man? Anyway, as soon as I crossed the threshold a hail of orders flew across the low room that formed the main attraction of the establishment. The reverend patron took instant possession of me, and directed his staff to carry my small traps to the best chamber the place held. He then shook his long grey locks, got me down in a corner, and thoroughly cross-questioned me as to my travels, the meaning of them, whether I was married, and my experience of the female sex in general. The whole thing was done inside of two minutes. So that the blushes had just faded from my face, and I was to some extent recovering from the effects of his last appalling wink when the ladies returned from their journey into the dim recesses of the hotel.

"If monsieur would be good enough to enter. On trouvers la chambre d'une proprieté extrême. Two artistes come from leaving it." I bowed my acknowledgments and proceeded to cross the farmyard in accordance with my instructions.

The whole inn had but one storey, and the sleeping apartments were ranged round the three sides of the yard, which was the home of carts, old wheels, scratching fowls, a goat or two, to say nothing of the pigs. There was also a growing manure-heap under my window. It was extremely rustic, though whether it would have appealed to M. Rostand is a matter of doubt. But what certainly would have appealed to him was what I found in my room—a baby donkey trying to get into my bed!! Fact! A dear little mouse-grey flea-bitten bourricot no bigger than a Newfoundland dog.

I took a turn up and down the village to observe the colonist 'de près.' It was certainly most instructive. His peculiarly baggy trousers, untidy shirt, gay waistband, and felt slippers, to my mind always give the French artisan a curiously deceptive appearance of intemperate laziness that is at times distressing. Somehow it seems difficult to associate the enormous energy that he can and does put into his work with the painful sloppiness of the man's outward dress. So much for the man at home, whether he be on the banks of the Rhone or the Seine. When one comes down South 'ça change.' An abandon of gayness takes the place of slop, but—but it seems to be accompanied by a woeful diminution of hidden energy.

Multiply this by about a thousand if you want to get the Arab workman par excellence. I was watching half a dozen of them trying to get a fly-wheel and shafting on to a cart. There was nothing particularly heavy about the article, but they struggled and wrestled with it as if it were a locomotive. Five times they tried to put it up on the cart ; as often as it went up, they would have all they could do to prevent its falling over the other side. The landlord, being a gentleman of leisure like myself, came out to watch the fun. He shook his head solemnly :

" I have been watching this sort of thing for the last forty years," said he. " Always the same. L'Arabe il n'a ni vouloir, ni savoir, ni pouvoir. But what will you, monsieur, I ask you, but what will you ! How can a man live off galette and oil and figs. Now look at me . . . !" I did so. He was certainly a hale and hearty old man, if a little grog-blossomy. He straightened up under my semi-admiring gaze. " For forty years I have taken my three litres of good red wine per day. Nothing better. Though at times I feel the need of an occasional petit verre. *That*, monsieur, is the way to live."

At this moment three French labourers came along ; they saw the Arabs' dilemma. In two minutes the wheel was safely in the cart, roped and braced in all security.

" Aha," said my companion, " nous autres, nous autres . . . ! Monsieur perhaps takes a little glass before dinner ? "

Next morning I was, as usual, up betimes, laying the foundation of good habits that I do most sincerely

ZIG-ZAGGING ALONG THE CONTOUR OF THE HILL-SIDE

hope and pray will remain with me to the end of my days.

The programme was to cross the mountains through a fine forest of cedars by the Col de Telmet, at an altitude of some five thousand feet. Early rising, a succulent breakfast, a clean, sharp smack to the air, and a bright sun not yet sufficiently high to be troublesome. What more do you want ?

On leaving Bernelle by the main—and only—road, a kilometre's pedalling brings you down past the cemetery to a fork, where you turn to the right to find yourself in a brace of shakes breasting a gradient of one in ten that runs up for some eight or nine miles to the pass itself.

Up, up, up you go, zig-zagging along the contour of the hill-side, right on into the forest, whilst far below a splendid panorama of the hill spreads out before your eyes.

Every now and then a most delightful whiff of the cedars comes drifting down upon you. At times you would imagine yourself wandering through a never-ending cigar-box.

Far below, one little valley struck me with its particular beauty. Some two or three native homesteads were grouped together and surrounded by little gardens full of heliotrope blossoms of a most delicate shade. I wished for the thousandth time that I was an artist instead of a slave of the little black box and roll films.

However, I had to do my best and I did it. I was just rolling up the used film when I noticed a gentleman in flashing white climbing one of the innumerable native tracks that characterise every hill-side throughout the country. Before him he was driving a fine fat mule of peculiar light grey; on this mule was seated a lady, also in white, with a soft floating foutah thrown over her head. Hello! thinks I to myself, here is something worth observing. The lady must be of particular and radiant beauty to be honoured with the mule whilst "hubby" walks—or she must be a very newly-married bride. In either case there is a picture worth seeing.

So I hurried on desperately, even to the extent of mounting my machine and driving the pedals round with a will. Taking all things into consideration, it seemed better to get a bit ahead, dismount, be ostentatiously occupied with repairing the machine, and trust to luck to get a really good photo. Accordingly, I set about accomplishing this little programme with the utmost skill that in me lay. And I am pleased to say that fortune favoured the brave.

As I rode past the lady, whose mule was just climbing into the road, I noticed her hastily replace her veil. That was my mark, so I dismounted some couple of hundred yards ahead and went through the whole performance as per time-table. Sure enough, when she saw how earnestly I was occupied with the "Pug," down came the veil again and, hubby, a

A MOVING RAINBOW

BURNISHED SILVER IN THE BRIGHT SUN

fine upstanding fellow of about thirty, never said her nay.

Nearer and nearer she came. I found that with a very little adroit manœuvring I could manage to get a snapshot whilst still keeping my back turned towards the pair. The sharp pitter-patter of the quick-stepping mule warned me of their very near approach, so I watched the good people out of the tail of my eye. Another step, and——

Heigh presto! the thing was done!

"Bonjour, monsieur," said the Arab gravely, as he passed, ignorant of my black sin.

"Bonjour, monsieur," I replied gravely, without even a blush. Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte.

Shortly afterwards he turned up again into another transverse, and I was left to continue my way in peace.

But a short time after I came across the most curious piece of hill-side in the whole day's march. Bare rock as steep and smooth as a house roof ran straight from the hill-top to the bottom of the valley with a strike of some sixty degrees. It shone like burnished silver in the bright sun. Never have I seen anything of the kind so beautiful. In various crevices were perched cedar-trees, sometimes with a rest so tiny that a miracle alone held them apparently from sliding down the chute. Great rotting trunks lay here and there by the roadside. Truth to tell, however, beautiful as the odour was, it became sometimes almost overpowering.

The mountain peaks were all covered with white. At times the breeze was distinctly wintry, though one was more or less sheltered by the flank of the hill. Not a soul was to be seen. Far, far below lay the winding ribbon of the road and the bright scarlet roofs of Corneille. At the top of the Col nothing was to be seen but the maison cantonière. Round and about me the wind-swept crests were crowned with rare, but triumphant, trees standing up stark and stiff from their beds of glittering snow. It was grand. I felt like a fly on the side of a jewelled palace.

One last rush forward and I was right on the top of the pass, the highest point in the whole route. The wind took me in the face like a whip-lash. It quite took my breath away.

I stood on the kilometre stone that crowns the pass and desecrated the place by taking a photo from each side; I then retired to the shelter of a friendly rock to absorb a jolly good brandy-and-water. It was really most invigorating.

What a climb to look back upon! What a coast down the other side to look forward to!

It is always well to take pleasure in the anticipations of life; so very frequently it is the only sort of pleasure one does get!

I thoroughly enjoyed my coast before I started, thank goodness! For, when it came to the actual riding, it only took two minutes to discover that the road was far too steep and the turnings far too numerous ; added to this were the fine new flints with which the road had just been re-metalled for the greater part of its length. About half-way down I came upon some of the delinquent menders and promptly consigned them, I regret to say, to the uttermost limits of Tophet. Such is human nature ; yet, in thinking it over in cold blood, I suppose that if they were never there I should not have been able to ride down at all !

For anyone who likes hanging on to the edge of a precipice I can thoroughly recommend the Ravin Bleu ; a fine tonic for the nerves. You really have so many things to occupy your attention that you do not notice much until Batna suddenly springs into view between the cliffs. For the moment it seems to be all red roofs and stone walls.

When you get to the bottom of the hill you breathe again ; then you note the time. It took just three hours to climb the other side ; it has taken just one to spin down this. Disappointing, to say the least of it !

But five minutes off the record would most assuredly have meant a few years more in heaven—or the other place. So perhaps it is as well.

CHAPTER XV

ON THE TRACK OF THE LEGION

THOUGH Batna exists in most people's imagination merely as a station on the road to Biskra, or more particularly perhaps as a starting-place for a motor trip to Timgad (price 40 fr.), it has its points of interest in another way for those who have a few minutes to spare.

Let me begin, then, by saying that Batna is a town mostly composed of soldiers. I think I said the same of Sétif, but here we go a step further. At Batna we are treading in the footsteps of Rome, for whom the civilian of the former town was a person almost wholly unsanctified, and not to be trusted overmuch. For this very good reason all arteries were built at right angles, that there might be as little as possible of dodging behind corners when the police were ordered to clear the streets. To a great extent the French have adopted this very excellent idea, so that in the whole of Batna you will search in vain for any of those enchanting quadrants, crescents, or twinings that are so dear to the builders of garden cities, where the same considerations do not hold good. Round the circumference of the town runs a nice wall, well loopholed and embrasured for guns. In order to make assurance doubly sure, the civilian and military quarters are kept quite separate. One half the town, in fact, consists of barracks pure and simple.

Batna, indeed, looks like a very neat provincial red-roofed French town with a layer of gold dust sprinkled over it. We must not forget the beautiful purple shadows, such shadows as would make a town's fortune if only they could be transported within a half-crown's Friday-to-Tuesday on the London and Brighton.

Though the little iron-shuttered square houses bear but a small resemblance to the Roman villa, yet the present occupiers of Batna regard the town as the modern Lambœsis of the country. Lambœsis, or Lambèse as the Gallic tongue will have it, in the old days was the garrison town of Mauretania and general guardian of the desert marches. We shall have an opportunity later of inspecting the ruins of the place, so for the present I will merely say that the gladiators still hold sway over the affections of the populace in a more modern form; which is a rather roundabout way of saying that I saw a football match.

I was idling away the afternoon as tourists will, having inspected the more obvious attractions of the place, sometimes casting a discriminating eye over the public buildings (one soon gets tired of going inside), and taking a well-earned hock to replenish my store of energy. Suddenly my eye was caught by the extreme brilliance of a scarlet banner gaily fluttering right above my head. It was lettered in gold; with a little neck-straining I could just make out the characters. The information conveyed was to the effect that that very afternoon even a grand match would take place between the Stade d'Batna and the Stade Sétifienne!

On the whole, the incident seemed so extraordinary that I determined to sacrifice the welcome shade of the café terrace and join the exciting queue that I could see coming down the street.

It was worth joining! First of all came the local band playing a rousing march, like the Besses o' the Barn let loose! then came the banners of the respective clubs (for sheer brilliance of colour I think the emerald-green background of Batna was more telling than the prosaic crimson of Sétif); close behind the banners came the teams. There was a most remarkable unanimity of 'tenue sportive' as regards the boots, stockings and "bags" of spotless white, though apparently there was some slight doubt as to whether one ought to wear a linen collar or not on such an auspicious occasion. Unfortunately, a regrettable spirit of indecision seemed to affect the head-gear, though I think the tasselled cap rather outshone the 'béret.' There was also an appalling consumption of cigarettes that would have strained the temper of the most placid captain from our side on the eve of so great a match.

Much as I should have liked to have joined this interesting part of the throng, modesty forbade; so I tucked myself quietly away in the bosom of the cheering crowd that followed. We stretched away for a couple of streets, collecting all the loafers, errant 'commis' and the like, within the radius of our stentorian voices, finally tailing off into a ragged crowd of boot-blacks and Arab touts. And in this wise we made the circumference of the town before striking off through the market-place to the drill ground, where the match was to be held.

Arrived at the ground itself I found that other Anglo-Saxon habits had followed in the train of 'soccer,' as there was a gate-money of twopence to be paid; this naturally disposed of three-quarters of us. So that when we actually got into the ground there was not that uncomfortable crush which is so distressing at a league match. Indeed, we formed a rather straggly line on touch, at least half of us being from the garrison.

When the whistle went I hitched up alongside of a rather smart-looking sergeant of chasseurs accompanied by a corporal. I forget precisely how it came about that I was included in the conversation, but so it happened.

"Monsieur is perhaps an Englishman?" asked my neighbour, who was a tall blonde Norman, with an engaging clear blue eye and a neatly-curled moustache.

"But yes," I replied. Oh, Son of an Island Race! never hide your shining light under a bushel; the mantle of Elijah hovers ever over your most worthy shoulders.

"Monsieur is without doubt an 'amateur' of football?" The mantle descended. I swelled visibly under the praise of this stalwart hero in sky-blue and white.

"Well, of course, I am always interested in the game; though now it is but rarely that I actually play." O, the black sin of suggestion, blacker far than 'suppressio veri.' It must be twenty years at least since I looked on a football with aught but shuddering.

"But all Englishmen are connoisseurs of the football!"

"I assure you that my knowledge is but small."

"Ah!" He smiled the smile of an infinite wisdom. "Monsieur is indeed modest, as are all his countrymen. Now what do you think of the play of that man with the ball, that 'comment dire'?"

"O-oh, the forward?" For the life of me I could not remember whether the man was a forward or back or what. One gets so infernally rusty over these things, but I had to say something. "Well, he does seem a bit slow with his feet."

"No, no! I don't mean *him;* I mean the man who *has* the ball—the half!"

Thunder! To be corrected by a Frenchman in the matter! This has to be looked into. I cleared my throat and lit up a fresh cigarette.

We took a turn up and down the field. From the

A FOOTBALL MATCH AT BATNA

curious glances of soldiers scattered about I gathered that my position was one of interest and that my companion bestowed no small honour on me in taking me under his wing. Probably the hero of the latest Moroccan skirmish! I determined to profit by the opportunity.

"What a wonderful country is your England," the chasseur remarked; the very home of sport! As, alas, is not yet la belle France."

"But you are making rapid progress. Look, for instance, at your football!"

God forgive me if my manner was in the slightest degree patronising; but I had that last mistake to make up for. My friend smiled ingenuously and hitched up his sabre. There is nothing in this world more encouraging than the ingenuous smile of the polite Frenchman.

I continued:

"The play of your forwards is excellent, if perhaps your backs and half-backs have yet to learn a little of our sangfroid."

"Mais ça c'est gentil! It does one good to hear candid criticism with knowledge behind it. It is all the more interesting to me as I only once played in a really important match."

"Really that is most interesting. And what match was it?"

"For the Club Sporting de France against Cambridge University."

Heavens! And me the expert!!

"Great Scott, it is already five o'clock. I must be off. I have an appointment en ville." With that I saluted them, turned on my heel, and beat the most rapid retreat compatible with discretion. When I had reached the opposite end of the ground I looked at my erstwhile companions; they were laughing long and loudly. At whom—?

And so I left the sun-baked ground and again sought the shelter of a café. The procession was returning from the match before I had fully recovered from the reverses of the afternoon. It so happened that as I looked up from my paper, the chasseur and his friend strolled idly past the door. With one accord folks turned to look.

Without doubt the man was a great hero. I enquired of the garçon.

"'L'Artiste'? But yes, monsieur. A fine lad of a heroism magnificent, par exemple."

"But excellent! In Morocco was it that the brave act was done?"

"Not in Morocco, monsieur, not in Morocco! At Constantine—but perhaps monsieur would like to hear the little story," he said with a smile. As there were only a few people in the café I accepted the fellow's offer with alacrity, and invited him to partake of some refreshment.

"We call him the artist, monsieur, for not only because it is the man's profession, but also for another and far greater reason—the skill with which he brought his exploit to a successful conclusion."

I nodded. What is in a hero's name—everything!

"As I said before," continued the waiter, "it happened in Constantine, and the noise of it ran from end to end of the land. Voici l'histoire: One of the generals-commanding—the exploit brought about the excellent officer's retirement—was a man with an inordinate desire for fêtes. He would fête everything and everyone from a passing senator to a danseuse de passage. If monsieur knows anything about the Algerian danseuse de passage he will understand how catholic was the good general's taste. Gossip said the old gentleman had a charming wife in Paris, but that of course was only rumour, and at the epoch of this particular story he was living very much en garçon.

"As usual, his manly heart was touched by the grace and beauty of the latest star of the theatrical firmament; so he decided that on the final night of the gentle charmer's triumph the town should be en fête; at least, so the story runs. It is true though that the marriage of a prominent citizen provided a very convenient excuse." My informant swung back in his chair and took a reflective puff at his cigarette. "There is no doubt about one thing," he went on, "and that is, that the 'petite femme' in whose honour the fête was really being held was chiefly responsible for the ordering of the entertainment.

Otherwise who would have elected to adorn the ' place ' with statues. Sculptors of note are neither as numerous nor as ripe as figs at Constantine. But such was the ' ordre du jour,' and the poor general was at his wits' end to satisfy the fair charmer's wishes. However, it is rare that the hour does not bring the man, n'est-ce pas ? It was at this very moment that l'Artiste came into the limelight.

" ' Mon colonel,' said he, ' I am a ci-devant rapin,' a cherished student of Gérome's. Give but the word, and I will satisfy your heart's desire, mon cher colonel.'

" ' Tiens, tiens,' said the colonel ; ' excellent, excellent ! But I want twenty statues by this day week. How are you to provide them *all*, I would ask you ? "

" L'Artiste smiled ; l'Artiste always does. It is possible that monsieur has noticed ? " Monsieur had —but that in passing. " ' Twenty statues,' said he, ' is it that mon colonel desires ? Is it permitted to be believed that mon cher colonel would make adequate return for the talent and energy displayed in such herculean labour ? '

" ' Twenty louis,' says the colonel, ' not a sou more.' The old boy was always niggardly enough where other people were concerned. L'Artiste scratched his head. One glance at the colonel's face showed it carved of rock.

" ' Done, oh my colonel, but give me first the twenty louis that I may make adequate preparation.'

" Non, non, par exemple, mon gars ! Here are ten louis—and dispensation from all military duties for a week. You shall have the other ten louis when the job is done.' With a few words of appropriate thanks l'Artiste pocketed the money and disappeared—for six days! Not a sign was to be seen of him, but on the contrary a good deal was heard. In conjunction with several other 'copains' he was daily and gloriously drunk. The colonel was furious, he gnawed his moustache in anger, for even a grizzled and weather-beaten 'culotte de peau' finds it difficult to believe that an artist can be drunk *every* day and yet produce twenty statues in a week! But still, what would you? The old boy had passed his word, so there the matter rested. At last, however, he got his chance! On the morning of the seventh day l'Artiste turned up fresh as a new pin looking not a whit the worse for his sustained carouse.

"'Et les statues!' stormed the colonel, red in the face with anger.

"'The statues, colonel?' replied the delinquent. 'Certainly, you shall have them all this evening.'

"'But you are damnably drunk every day!'

"'Me, colonel, do I look it? What scoundrel has been traducing my character so vilely?' It was quite true the fellow looked as if he had just come out of a bandbox. The colonel was to some extent mollified.

"'Well, what do you want?' he asked gruffly.

"'A little sum on account—the other ten louis, if possible.'

" ' Well, of all the damned——'

" ' It is essential, colonel. I have had some quite unexpected expense just come upon me, and without the money the statues cannot possibly be delivered." Cornered, though still suspicious, the colonel could do nothing but hand over.

" ' But look here, my friend, if those statues are not on hand this evening, je te coffrerai et tu verras ! '

" ' Be tranquil, mon colonel. They will be there ! ' So saying, the fellow departed.

" True to his word, at the appointed hour there were the marble statues ranged around the square. And wonderful they were too. Marvellous exhibitions of the sculptor's skill. The world gasped with amazement; none more so than the colonel's charming guest.

" ' Oh, how beautiful, how marvellous ! ' she cried, as she glanced from one gem of snow-white marble to the next. ' What men ! What thews ! What limbs ! How adorable ! '

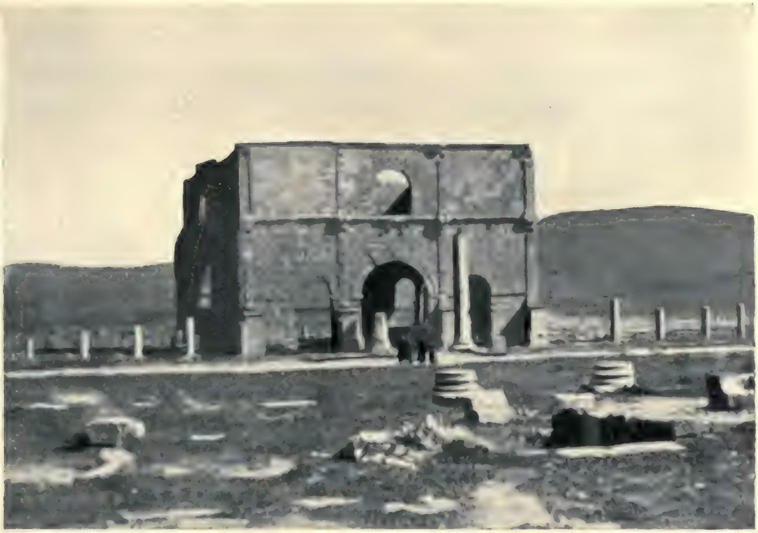
" ' Eh, what ? ' said the colonel, not at all pleased with the turn things were taking.

" ' If men were really like that, I believe I should run away with every one of them. If only they were alive ! ' In her excitement she grabbed the nearest one excitedly by the arm.

" It sprang to the ground . . . and bolted ! So did the rest !

" On se sauva ! . . .

" The town roared for months over the little joke



THE PRÆTORIUM AT LAMBÈSE

AMONGST THE FOOTHILLS

at the colonel's expense . . . whilst l'Artiste and his masterpieces beat fruitlessly upon the walls of their cells."

In military strategy there seems to be as little change, when one comes to consider points of vantage, as there is in the world of fashion. A temporary change here and there maybe; but in the end the cycle is completed and, lo and behold, here we are again at the starting-point.

The French consider Batna to be the key of the Sahara, whilst the Romans pinned their faith to Lambœsis; the new and the old towns are only some ten or eleven kilometres apart.

A long uninteresting run up a slight incline brings one to Lambœsis, where the first ruins occur; a fine prætorium in a good state of preservation, a grand triumphal arch (the arch of Commodus), together with a few thousand stones, bits of pillars, foundations and the like, also a few stone projectiles. Septimius Severus also has a fine arch in his honour.

Though the Romans never actually held the Sahara as do the French, unless you can assign to them that vast tract after the modern manner—on the strength of Septimius Flaccus and Julius Maternus having penetrated right down to the oasis of Aïr in the heart of the Kel-Oui Touaregs, what they did hold they kept a pretty firm grip upon.

After the last Punic wars and the death of Jugurtha, the whole of Numidia and Mauretania fell into Roman hands (of which last department, by the way, Tacitus was one time consul). From that time on, the province became the home of the IIIrd Augustan Legion, the 'Pia Vindex,' until the last flicker of Rome's actual authority was snuffed out in the fifth century by the Vandals. It was a long run, with only one short interlude, when the Empire saw several Emperors in the field at once and the Imperial toga tossed from one sword point to another. The IIIrd Gordian disbanded the IIIrd Augusta for having sided with the legate Capellianus under the standard of that human tiger Maximian. After this unhappy little disgrace, however, which was carried even to the extent of erasing the very name of the legion from inscriptions, affairs took a turn for the better. This would be about 238 A.D. In 253 A.D. the dual emperors Gallienus and Valerianus found it advisable to call the disgraced troops to the colours again. Henceforward the reformed 'Pia Vindex' continued the even tenour of its way, until that fatal day in Thrace when Valentinian and the flower of the Roman Army went down in a welter of blood before the barbarians in the Last Battle of the Legions. So that it will be seen the Legion had plenty of opportunity of leaving its mark upon the country. It made the most of its chances.

It does seem rather a pity that the only permanent garrison now left on the spot should consist of a prison full of ‘ joyeux,’ or civil convicts, who are to finish their service in the Armée d’Afrique.

In a sense, I suppose, you might call Lambèse the nursery of the ‘ Bats. d’Af.’ Not a bad nursery either by all accounts. If you were to ask the inhabitants of the forbidding, high-walled building over the way, round which echoes the ceasless fall of the ‘ cent pas,’ you would find that of all the ‘ maison penitencières ’ Lambèse is considered the least objectionable. Not on account of the fine air, nor yet of the vineyards of St. Eugène close by ; but surely and simply because —the ‘ condamnés ’ have been employed in the excavations of the Roman ruins.

As a concrete instance of the effect of interesting work on the trend of a convict’s mind I humbly put forward the following well-substantiated example, asking the gentle reader to bear in mind that the joyeux undergoing sentence in the prisons of Algeria is about as ‘ tough ’ an article as you would find anywhere this side of the River Styx.

At Lambèse and elsewhere—where the joyeux were employed in excavation—the various statues, inscriptions, remains, etc., were brought to the surface with the utmost care, one might almost say reverence. The convicts interested themselves vastly in what they did find, very frequently appealing to their officers for information about the ‘ trouvaille ’ ! What is more, the discipline maintained during the whole duration of the work was uniformly very good.

Most of us lump together in a delightfully irresponsible way, if we have ever heard of them, the Foreign Legion, the 'Bataillons d'Afrique' and the 'compagnies de discipline.' They are all scallawags; that is sufficient. In point of actual fact there is a vast difference between the above corps.

Most of us know the Foreign Legion, famed in song and story, recruited from 'hard cases,' who have either no ability or no hope of getting any other sort of a job, from men who are sick of themselves or of the eternal round of cities. No questions are asked when you join, and no information is given to inquisitive outsiders. Perhaps for this reason it has counted in its ranks princes of the blood, noblemen of all degrees, bishops and parsons, officers and professional men of every description who rub shoulders with the escaped burglar or the murderer in hiding.

In numbers it counts some 7000 men on the active list and about 35,000 reservists. The officers and men are of every nationality—even American. Owning no country, the regimental flag is embroidered with the word *Valeur* instead *Patrie*. Endless stories, more or less true, are told of the hardihood and devilry of these taciturn gentlemen who sport the blue coat and white breeches. It is said that they are remarkable for the frequency of their ablutions, the spotlessness of their raiment, and their marvellous gift of raising the wind. As between one gentleman and another discipline is somewhat relaxed in the minor points of military etiquette; but it strikes with a terrible severity on the gross offender.

There is the story of the corporal, an Austrian ex-colonel, who delivered a weekly lecture on tactics and strategy to the officers of his battalion, including his own colonel! Also of the journalist who was invited to the officers' mess, only to receive an apology for the lack of virtuosity in the orchestra in the following term:—

"I believe that our band is considered one of the very finest in Europe," said a major, "and I should have particularly liked you to hear the first violin, a veritable genius; he was gold-medalled at the Conservatoire in Vienna. Unfortunately he is at present doing fourteen days for drunk and disorderly!"

As might well be imagined, there is a 'go' in the marches that would leave even an American ragtime band gasping for breath. So much for the 'Légion Etrangère.'

Let us now pass to the Bataillons d'Afrique, or 'Bats. d'Af.' as they are usually called. They differ from the ordinary regiment of the line only in so far that discipline is more strict all round. Consisting as they do of ordinary soldiers who have committed some military or civil offence, they are in no sense voluntary; but it is merely a method of keeping a firm hand on the ex-convict whilst he finishes his military training. Under these circumstances there is neither that camaraderie between officer and man that is found in the Legion, nor does the same halo of romance surround them. Still, the men carry their side-arms and enjoy personal liberty. They say the great difficulty with these battalions is the question of officers.

Little can be said about the 'compagnies de discipline,' except that the discipline is reported to be such as is best calculated to drive out of a man any vestige of humanity that the previous part of his 'tracasserie' may have left. The wretched men wear a uniform of drugget, carry no side-arms, and altogether bear the mark of the beast; yet the poor fellows have committed no crime or misdemeanour of any sort, but merely shown symptoms of insubordination. Truly the 'esprit militaire' is somewhat difficult of comprehension.

As would be expected, the percentage of illiterates runs high in the 'Bats. d'Af.'—as high, indeed, as the moral sense is low. All the non-coms. carry a loaded revolver; moreover, it is said that practically no officer dare pass through the men's quarters alone without running a very great risk of being set upon. If there is an enquiry, of course, he was the aggressor; it would be impossible to find evidence to the contrary.

"On ne constate pas aux bataillons d'Afrique."

This has been a long digression, though I hope not an unpardonable one; for the memory of that forbidding prison standing on the desolate wilderness of Roman ruins is deeply engraven in my mind.

But to get on to more cheerful topics: whilst I was busy avoiding the ministrations of a local guide, what should drive up but a most gorgeous car filled with a lusty band of Teutons. I was devoutly thankful, for the wily Arab left me, in the hopes of a more likely prey.

To all appearance he was successful, for out came note-books and pencils and the family group gathered round to absorb the fluent lies that slid smoothly from the orator's mouth.

CHAPTER XVI

TIMGAD AND THE LEGION

A LONG climb amongst the foot-hills, distressingly bare and lacking in interest, brings one to Markouna, where there are a couple more triumphal arches which give one the lie of the old Roman road.

I must confess to having had a surfeit of ruins for the time being, so I took the greater interest in the behaviour of that same great car which had followed me from Lambèse. It was a terriffic affair—eight cylinders; and it came up the hill with that steady rumble that always gives one the impression of inexhaustible power. For once in a way I was democratic to my finger-tips, as the plutocrats passed without once deigning to give a glance at the impecunious cyclist toiling by the roadside.

On I toiled to the crest of the rise. When—*gloria in excelsis!* The car had broken down! I can tell you that I made my machine travel down the long descent that leads on to Timgad. There were some twenty kilometres to be done. With the wind behind me and a good gradient I travelled down that hill like a rifle bullet.

Wayside inns are a matter of surpassing interest to the traveller; one might indeed say that they form the most interesting items of his tour. As a rule they are either good or bad. So that, having a due regard to their number, one does not discourse upon them unless they are—very good or damn bad.

Therefore, all I will say about the hotel at Timgad is that "damn" is scarcely strong enough.

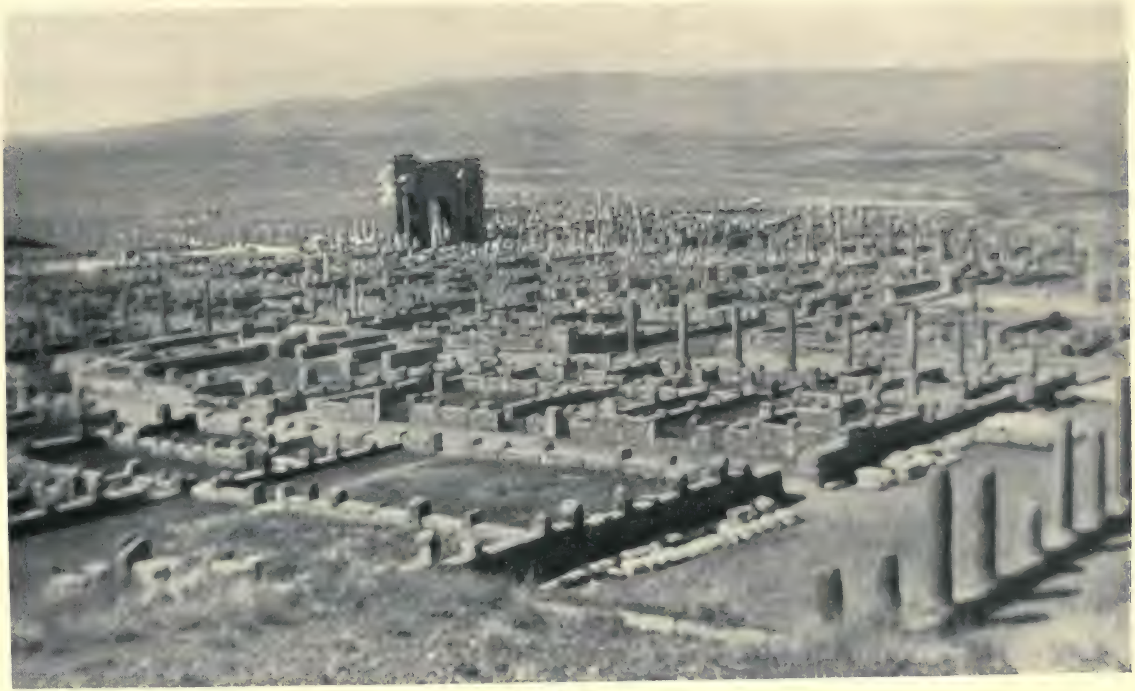
On certain days of the week a great market is held near by. It may be that it was a habit inculcated in the days of Timgad's glory; on the other hand, it may ante-date the latter by ten thousand years. The Berber has seen the Roman in and he has seen him out. Probably that same market will be held in the same old-fashioned way by similar white-robed, bargaining, grasping Kabyles ten thousand years hence.

After the Vandals had been beaten by the Byzantines, Solomon—the successor of Belisarius—marched into the Aurès with a view to chastising the Berbers in 535 A.D. He found Thamagudi in smoking ruins. With a singular lack of regard for the antiquarian of the future the mountaineers had burnt the place as objectionable from a military point of view.

By order of the Emperor Justinian, a fortress was built out of the remains; also a couple of monasteries and some few churches. This change of fortune gave the place a hundred years of nightmarish tranquillity—the Greek Empire of Byzantium ever slept uneasily.

Abd Allah ibn Said descended upon Thamagudi with fire and sword in the name of the Prophet and slew the Patriarch Gregory together with most of his men in the beginning of the seventh century. Under Kahenna the Moors and what remained of the Greeks combined to oppose the interloper, as is usual in domestic quarrels. They met with some reward, and managed to entrap Sidi Okba of famous memory, putting him to death; this was a last flash in the pan, for in 698 Kaled, the Arab, destroyed Kahenna with his armies. From that day Thamagudi ceased to exist, dropping slowly back down the waters of oblivion—until but a few native rumours, backed up by the outcrop of a portion of Trajan's arch above the ground, alone remained to mark the resting-place of one of the greatest masterpieces of the Imperial Legions.

It is curious to think how the place lay buried and forgotten for so many long centuries, until the not unkind fates delivered it into the hands of the very people best calculated to revive the memory of Timgad's old renown. Conservative to the last degree in their reverence for the works of the past, the French leapt at the possibilities enshrined in the déblayage. In our happy-go-lucky way we could never have dreamed of tackling the matter with such skill and acumen—most probably never a sod would have been turned. There are too many ruins about our own country which tell a ghastly story of neglect for one ever to imagine a better fate for any colonial treasure, unless some public benefactor or rising millionaire were to find therein an easy means of advertisement.



TRAJAN'S ARCH

French archæologists and French money have worked to great effect amongst the ruins—purely, of course, in the cause of science; but they would have been more than human had they resisted the temptation to make just a *little* political capital out of the business.

It must be remembered that France takes any and every opportunity of impressing people that she is the legitimate successor of Rome in North Africa, that her ways are Rome's ways, that she successfully follows in the footsteps of the Old Lady of the Tiber.

So far do they carry this point that at the earliest opportunity Colonel Corbuccia paraded his men past the tomb of O. Flavius Maximus, Prefect of the IIIrd Augusta; and l'Archevêque Lafeyrière read mass by the altar of the Basilica.

There is a saving quality about the artistry of the whole affair that makes the ad. truly delicious.

Considering a nation with so well developed an artistic sense as the French, one wonders how they came to erect the abortion of stucco and red brick that they dignify by the name of "museum." That is the first thing that strikes one at Timgad, which is unfortunate; for it takes one about half an hour to get over the shock, and by that time lunch is ready, so that much valuable time has been lost before one really gets to work sight-seeing.

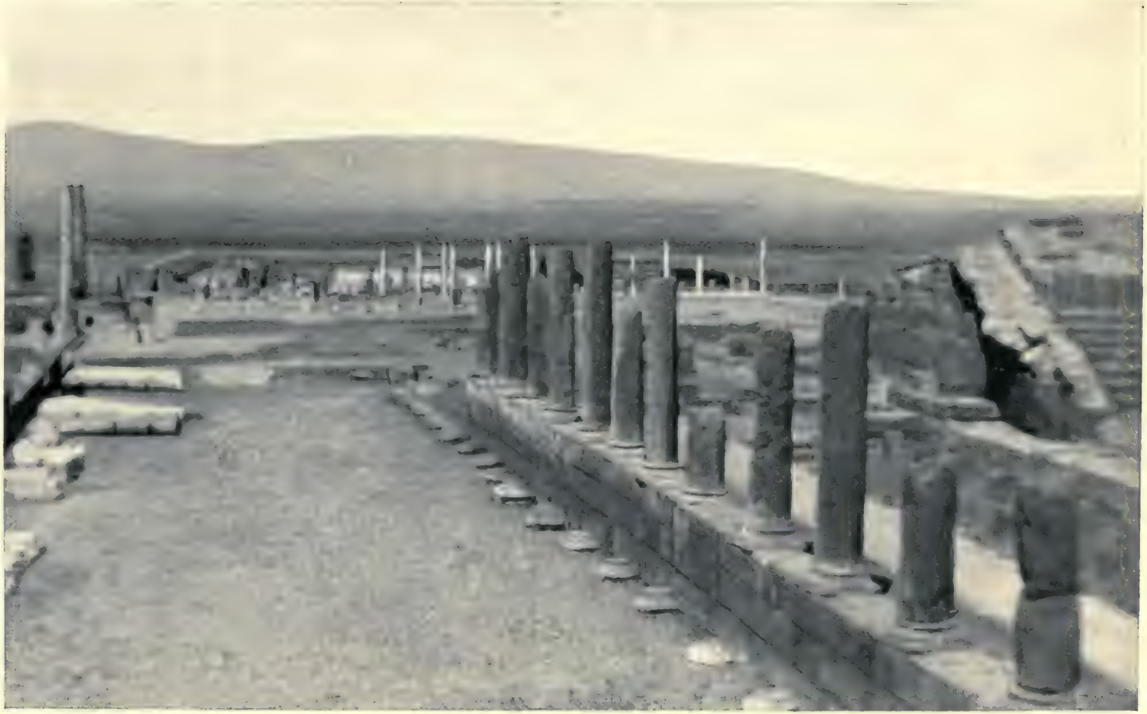
I have had my say about the hotel, so we will pass over the meal in silence and get out on to the Cardo

Maximus, a great road running from north to south of the town.

One enters the city by the Cirta gate; in ruins, of course, but still showing the pivot holes on which swung the huge hinges. An inscription tells us that the august Trajan founded the colony in the year 100 A.D. by the hands of the IIIrd Legion, Lucius Munatius Gallus being Legate Proprætor. The Cardo Maximus is superbly flagged with blue limestone and is altogether a splendid road, built as only the Romans cared to build. To come to less romantic topics, it has a main sewer running the whole length of its way with the latest thing in man-traps! Perhaps this little piece of information will prepare you for the knowledge that there are remains of no less than thirteen public baths! Not the sort of holes that we are pleased to designate as such in London, for instance, but proper contrivances for the delight of mankind, with hot and cold rooms, rooms for vapour baths, exercising rooms, rooms for repose, all beautifully mosaiqued and adorned with statues. Let me catalogue the resources of one of the smaller.

Rooms for exercise, for conversation, for promenade; fonts of cold water; hot rooms at three different degrees of temperature, heated by hot air; various offices and dressing-rooms. There were even special passages for the domestics.

A bath was taken as follows; first you had a cold douche, then you proceeded to three hot rooms in



THE CARDO MAXIMUS

order, returning by the same gradation, finally taking another cold splash, after which you were taken charge of by a slave whose pleasant duty it was to scratch you with the 'strigile' previous to anointing you with pleasant perfumes.

On this same Cardo Maximus was also situated the public library; but before we glance at this latter building there is one point with regard to the road to which I should like to draw attention. It is this: so great was the care taken in the construction of the roads of this city that the flags are placed relatively to the axis of the road in such a manner that the joints are also inclined to the axis, whereby the minimum amount of jolting is ensured as the wheels pass. Before crossing the Decumanus Maximus, the other main street of the city, there is a sharp rise in the Cardo; it is nearly at the point of junction that we find the library.

Great care has been taken in the restoration of this ruin, as, indeed, is the case throughout the whole place. You enter by an open court surrounded by pillars of white marble, and it is well to remember that under an Algerian sun white *is* white. Owing to the slope of the hill, the library is built on a terrace to which access is gained by steps varying in number according to the angle of slope. You then cross a gallery into the main hall, of which the further end is semi-circular. It is surrounded by delicate pillars of white marble. Between each pillar and its fellow is a niche which undoubtedly formed a store cabinet for the papyri. Right in the apex, as one might say, is a larger niche, which probably enshrined a statue of the patron deity of the town. Round the central hall are distributed various other chambers for reading. Just one little touch, at the right moment, brought me that homely feeling of familiarity which makes the whole place and its founder live before my very eyes.

One Rogatianus, a man of wealth, willed to his native town the sum of 400,000 sesterces for the building of this library. At least, so says an inscription. Excellent! But wait for the cream of the jest. By custom his heirs were bound to add to the gift a correspondingly large sum. How that man did know his loving relatives!

A few steps now bring you on to the Decumanus Maximus, originally finer than the Cardo. It is about half a mile long, flagged like the other with blue limestone, and built in two pieces so that portions form an obtuse angle pointing towards the north. On this street stood the Forum and the Arch of Vespasian.

What a sight it must have been in the old days with its gay shops, its great public buildings, the crowding throng of olive-skinned men, the bold-eyed women bedizened with flashing jewels and gay scarves. How the chariots must have rumbled by (to this day you can see the flags worn into ruts by the constant grinding of endless wheels!). Think of the surgings and jostlings as some great man's litter comes swinging by, surrounded by a crowd of fawning clients. Perhaps even a tragedy.

The litter stops.

"What is the matter?" an angry voice demands from within. One of the bearers is overcome with the heat and can do no more.

"Give him a hundred blows with a cudgel!"—and fling him bleeding in the gutter. Living or dead, only a slave! Who cares? Pass on.

About every hundred yards or so you come across the remains of baths, but since one vastly resembles the other in all but size we will not bother about them any more.

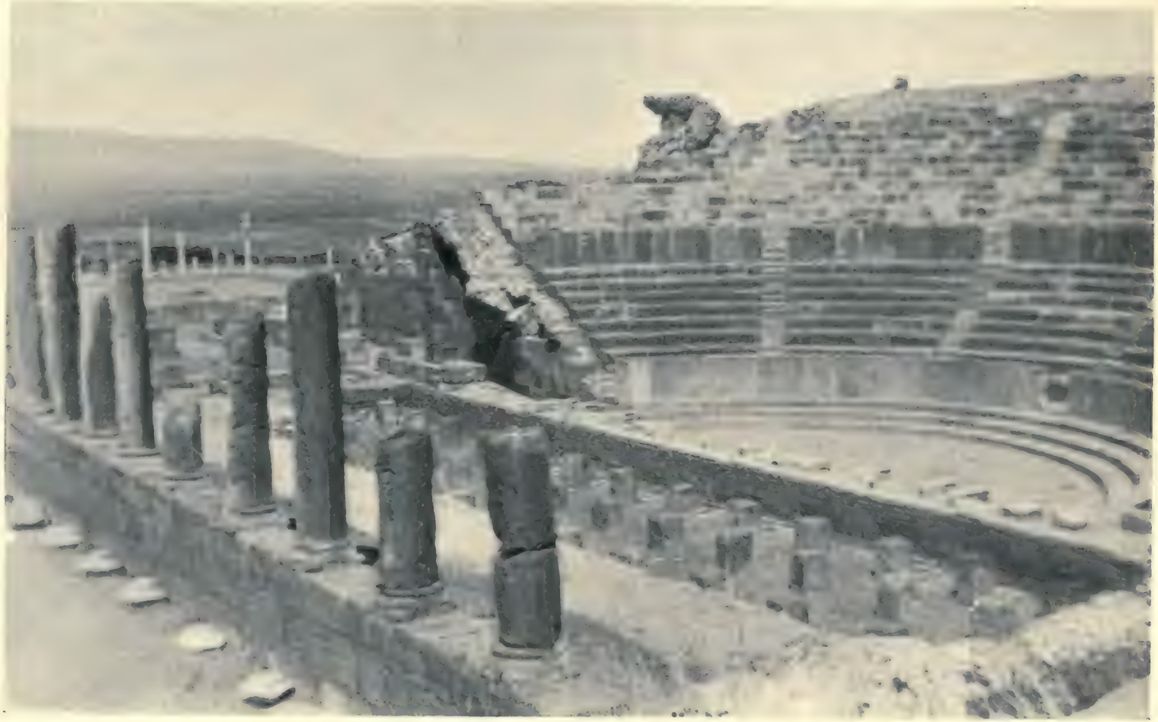
At the gate of the east suburb is a great triumphal arch built in honour of Marcus Aurelius, about 171 A.D., with an inscription showing that at that time the city underwent considerable enlargement in this direction. It must have been about two hundred years before the tide of disaster rolled the confines of Thamagudi once again past this proud point, on their return and final journey. Even in its ruin the shattered stateliness of the great glittering way is very fine.

But then there are many very glorious things about Timgad; perhaps not the least among them is the Maison aux Jardinières, as it is called, which has very fine mosaic on the flooring in the tablium, or study, in addition to some pretty jardinières in the atrium. The double-face masks that crown the sides of the jardinières are masterpieces of the sculptor's art.

By the by, whilst we are on the subject of houses it may be well to add that the flushing of all drains was performed by the same system of running water that created so much excitement when European architects "discovered" it not so very long ago!

With us the great institution is the morning paper. No man would willingly admit that he is so behind the times as not to take in his morning paper; moreover, his rulers would certainly not encourage him to take that fatal step; else how would they control the opinions of the independent voter? In Roman life the forum of every town held a like position. It contained the area where Tom, Dick, and Harry met together to discuss their grievances; there was the curia or senate where the grey-beards wagged together in unison over the shortcomings of the rising generation; there was the tribune on which the orators and politicians of every party earned their money; the basilica or law court; finally, let us not forget the local prison, which was also a necessary adjunct, much as the stocks used to be with us.

Timgad's forum is lacking in none of these essentials. Its vast proportions, its stately pillars, the number of its surrounding macellæ or merchants' stalls show what a grand monument of Imperial Rome it must have been. Two rather interesting finds there were: the torso of one Lucius Verus, of whom more later, and two lists of decurions, or squadron commanders. Like



THE THEATRE AT TIMGAD

every other monument hereabouts the forum glitters white in the sun.

Down the row of pillars flanking the portico of the building one sees the Arch of Vespasian. It is very fine.

Here folks cannot be over-serious for long, however, and humour will ever have her way. On the pavement are graved the words: "To hunt, to bathe, to laugh—that is life." Is that the wisdom of youth or of age?

We now pass on to the theatre.

Presumably you have already noticed one or two details about the construction of Timgad which remind you horribly of a modern city, so it will give you no shock to learn that the theatre in Timgad is terribly up to date in its contrivances.

First of all the semi-circular form (a theatre was generally built in some little hollow on the side of a hill); the tiers upon tiers of circles with gangways to admit the spectators, also the sweetmeat-sellers and other pests of the period; the orchestra or pit for the groundlings; and the stage (pulpitum). All Roman theatres, besides the changeable scenery, had a richly-decorated permanent scæna at the back of all the others. Under and around the stage are grouped various dressing-rooms and so forth, not forgetting, of course, the stage-door and promenade. The Roman 'blood' had much the same penchants as his successor of to-day.

In keeping with local conditions the theatre of antiquity was roofless, awnings serving to shelter the spectators in the more expensive parts of the theatre. But the theatre also had an adjunct which might well be copied to-day. There was a curtain which was rung down before the play commenced! If only we had a like contrivance, on occasion it could be kept down during the whole of the performance!

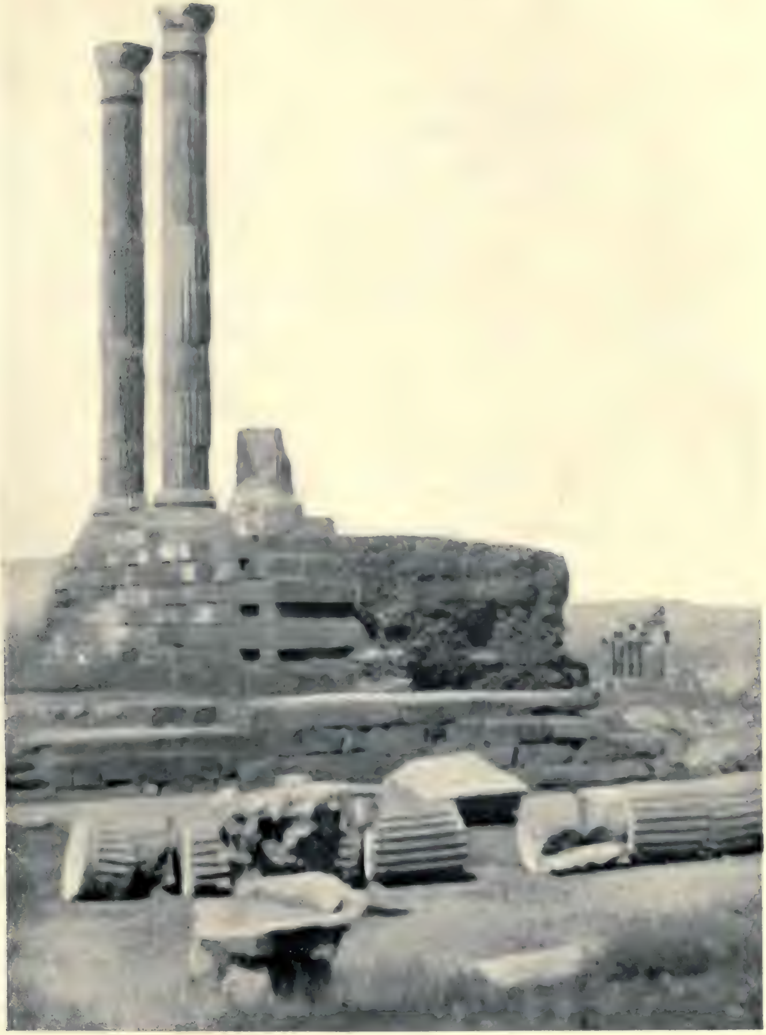
The stone parts of this particular building are still in an excellent state of preservation. A calculation has shown it capable of seating four thousand people.

More baths! I'm sorry; but really I must mention these; firstly because of the great exercise 'salle,' 72 feet by 27; secondly because of the cloak-room. It would appear that the theft of a bather's clothes was much practised in Thamagudi. The furnace-room contained nine furnaces! You still see cinders adhering to their walls.

Two inscriptions have been found imprinted on clay floor tiles of one of the thermes; they read sufficiently curiously: "To the well-doer, prosperity according to his words," written by Saturnus; and "I have given thee hope for fear that thou despairest; thou hast read, go!" written by Saturninus.

Evidently the mind of antiquity appreciated the point that cleanliness and true philosophy go hand in hand.

When Byzantium took the reins from the dead hands of Rome, it was but with a nerveless grasp. Though



THE CAPITOL AT TIMGAD

the fort they built is large, according to the ruins; though they backed it up with chapels galore and monasteries from the ruins of the fast dying city—as witness many of the stones employed, which originally, by their inscriptions, served as tombstones to the veterans of the IIIrd Augusta; yet it is doubtful if the city at this late epoch extended beyond the circumscribed boundaries of its early youth.

When the ruins were opened up they came across a potter's store-room, which contained about fifty brand-new earthenware lamps. In a brass-founder's, the furnace was just re-charged and ready to be lit. These ruins were of the Christian period.

Perhaps these tell-tale remains witness the terrible day of the final Arab assault on the doomed city. Who knows?

As Christian communities strive to show a brotherly love in outvying each other in the matter of church steeples, so the colonies of Rome were nothing if not very "game" when it came to the Capitol. And so, as the Capitol had no spire, they put it into the pillars. Those at Timgad are of truly gigantic dimensions.

It has been established that according to the Etruscan tradition a town was not really founded until shrines had been built for the three divinities: Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. These formed the Capitol.

Of the twenty-two huge pillars that originally crowned the pronaos, two have been re-erected by the cares of the excavation department. They measure no less than forty-eight feet in height! By the fragments that have been discovered, the statues enshrined must have been equally enormous.

On the Via Capitolina is one particular spot of much interest; it is where the general distribution of the debris and the redness of the masonry tell you that a terrific fire must have raged at one time. What brings the scene so clearly home to you is that the ground is a veritable treasure-ground for antique jewellery and so forth; evidently things that have been dropped by the victims in their headlong flight.

A certain gentleman of Thamagudi, named Marcus Plotius Faustus Sertius, was, by the inscriptions, a man of considerable note. The remains of his mansion prove that it was decidedly the largest house in the city. As was only fitting, he was a Roman knight and general, commanding the cohorts and squadrons of the auxiliary army. Evidently a man of standing; but also a philanthropist. For this gallant militia officer also presented the town with two magnificent market-places!

Another touch of nature: one learns that the donor of the local reservoir held municipal offices not only at Thamagudi, but also at Thysdrus in Tunisia, many long miles away!

The amount of ground excavated is really very large when one remembers that the annual sum allotted to the good work by the Government is only about two thousand pounds a year. However, manners make up for a lot. It seems to me a particularly charming idea that when the déblayage of the great basilica was completed in 1894, the Archbishop of Constantine, Mgr. Lafeyrière, should hold a service there, thus again picking up the threads dropped twelve hundred years ago. It must have been a very fine building, as it has a central nave some 110 feet long.

Of course, there are endless things to be seen; one wants a month on the place, not a few hours; but a poor devil of a cyclist has to keep his time and seasons. So I will confine myself to a final look at Trajan's Arch and then decamp. Once again, the first shall be the last—but assuredly not the least; for it was by this arch that the city was originally located.

The great monument is formed of a central and two side arches; above these latter, rectangular niches with red marble pillars held statues in fine white marble from Menah. Both faces of the arch were decorated in like manner with four great pillars in this glittering white stone. The whole was probably crowned by an immense quadriga. What a picture it must have formed! Even as you look down upon it now from the hill behind the theatre there is something awe-inspiring in its majesty.

But is that not so with every stone of these fair white ruins. Remnants, truly, of one of the vast cities of the plain! Mere acreage points plainly to an overwhelming prosperity at one time. Placed at the confluence of two important valleys designedly, it would appear to have been the market for the whole Aurès and garrison too. It must have been a regular Peshawur of its time. If only for a moment those tall columns could rise again, the fountains play, the crowded dead rise from their graves, the chariots go rattling by, and the white-clad tribesmen come pouring down from the hills to market. What a sight for the gods! Rome could conquer all but—Time.

CHAPTER XVII

EL-KANTARA

WHETHER or no it was that the good folks of the hotel in Batna were charmed by the account I gave them of the scandalous state of affairs at Timgad I do not know, but very certainly there was a Christian charity about the bill that will endear them to me for the term of my natural life.

We are now on the main road from Constantine to Biskra; so adieu to all peace and quietness. The long, dusty road, stretching right away to the Sahara, is dotted at intervals with clouds of dust where the camels come swinging along: great caravans coming in through Biskra from the desert, being rushed up-country to Sétif and Constantine. Big caravans are cut up into groups of three as a rule, headed by the guide on a 'behari,' and marching at intervals of some two or three hundred yards to minimise the dust. At this time of the year they put on the pace so as to get back before the hottest weather comes, many of them having very probably a couple of months' journey on the road home to Ouargla, or perhaps further.

Suddenly there is a 'couin-couin' behind and a dusty monster whizzes by, stinking of petrol. The camels don't seem to mind one little bit. Another passes; still no protest! Yet another; and so the stream goes on. Is it Eastern politeness that produces this acquiescence, or merely an infinite contempt?

"You may be internal combustion engines," they seem to say, "but we also can live on our humps." And the man on the behari wags his beard solemnly. "Ai! Ai!" says he. "Allah! The age of the infidel will soon be past. Thou and I, my swift one, we go on for ever!"

One climbs gently for about twenty kilometres from Batna, then one enters a sort of valley between two insignificant groups of hills; and so to Macmahon.

A very monotonous road, though the land is passably well cultivated.

Macmahon consists of one long disreputable street, and a café which might be called an hotel by the charitable. Presumably the village name was intended to honour the famous Marshal. The good general had a profound opinion of his own merits; he would turn in his grave if he were to see the thing that straggles out its loose-ended and flabby existence under his name.

However, the tariff is as high as the food is bad; so that on the whole things are levelled up a bit.

After leaving Macmahon behind one begins a descent down a valley absolutely devoid of vegetation.

It consists simply of hills of red earth and a shingly river-bed, or oued, down which trickles the tiniest of streams. The river, which meanders very much, has simply cut down through the underlying stratum like a knife, leaving perfectly perpendicular banks of considerable height. To produce such an effect the rains must be torrential when they do occur; by all accounts such is the case.

Following the endless windings of the road through this desolate region, such a stretch of absolutely arid soil would make one feel very depressed indeed were it not for the bright sunlight and the striking shadows that throw into powerful relief the reds (in infinite variety and gradation), the yellows, the umbers, and the ochres. The very stones take on a silvery sheen. There is such a pitiless blaring dryness about the place that it is with a profound sensation of relief one comes upon the solid grandeur of the ravines and towering peaks at the Tamarins. Here, at any rate, you feel in the presence of an all-conquering nature, not merely of the spiteful pleasure of a jealous Pomona.

It would seem more fitting that the roads should be less well engineered. Somehow a good road through a desolate land destroys the illusion. It reminds you too constantly that man has been there before. Loneliness is the only artistic asset that desolation can really be said to possess.

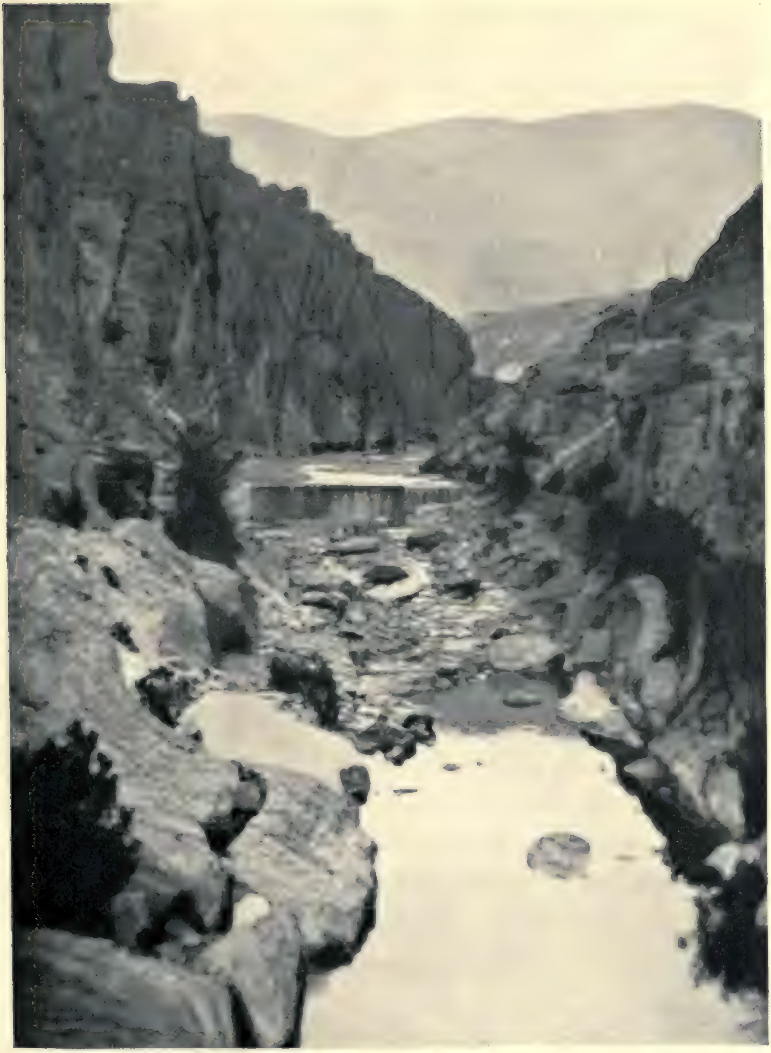
So it will readily be appreciated how, when I saw a party of tourists lop-lolloping along the road in front, my heart gave one bound of joy, and I laughed foolishly and without control.

For the moment I was at a loss to explain their presence. What on earth was there to attract a family of perspiring Germans—the reader will perhaps have already comprehended that they were my friends of the great grey car ; as I said, what on earth could have persuaded them to forsake the luxury of a car for the jolting backs of flea-bitten mules !

As they jolted first on one side and then on the other, my heart went out towards them. Bumpity--bump, thwack ! The lopsided mule would stumble forward. "Ai ! Ai !" The boys would spring forward to save the ladies. Happy were the mere males who gripped fiercely the peaks of their saddles !

But to my jaundiced eye—the memory of that car was still haunting me—nothing was so sweet as the rearguard, in response to whose earnest cries the whole party soon came to a halt. Never have I seen such a fat man—never ! By that same token he rode the smallest mule ! Two Arabs held him in his seat whilst a third led his mount. As the beast lurched forward the victim swung back, and the boys shoved up with a will. "Ai ! Ai !"

When the party stopped to mop the perspiration pouring from their brows I passed them and spun singing down the road. What could have been the meaning of it ? A later consideration of the guide-book showed that a mule-ride through the Gorges of



CLIFFS OF SANDSTONE-GRIT RISE SHEER IN THE AIR

El-Kantara was one of the essential details of a tour in Algeria. Had I known at the moment what a duty I had neglected, would I have pushed onward with a feeling of bitter despair to fling myself over the stony parapet on to the cruel rocks of El-Kantara? Judge for me!

Gradually the rocks close in, towering above your head; higher and yet higher they reach, until you wonder when they are going to stop. What a beautiful rosy hue there is, whilst the gorge itself is in deep shadow. It narrows down to a bare hundred and fifty yards wide or so. On either side the cliffs of sandstone-grit rise sheer in the air for some four or five hundred feet, terminating in curiously-shaped overhanging peaks. (One peak, for some occult reason, figures in the survey as a forest!)

At the entry of the narrowest part of the Gorges the river is spanned in one great arch by an old Roman bridge in excellent preservation. In fact, so excellent was the masonry that all the French engineers had to do was to re-metal the way!

If all the artists of all the ages were to dangle their legs for all time over the cliffs of El-Kantara and consider the best method of adding to the absolute grandeur of the gorge, they could hit on no more excellent way of lengthening what I believe artists call the middle distance than the fortuitous posing of those old grey chunks of Roman stone.

On first entering the gorge you seem to see no end to it ; the rocks close round you on all sides, you feel crushed and fly-like. Then suddenly the overhanging walls open out ; far away in the illimitable distance you see the purple mountains stretching right and left, seemingly for ever. At your feet lies the oasis of the Foum es Sahara, the Mouth of the Desert.

You are on to it at last, the weird bluey-green of the waving palms and undergrowth, the square-shaped mud dwellings dotting the blues here and there with a dusty hot brown, and, over all, dancing that shimmering heat that no brush has ever painted, no pen ever described. Down the centre wanders a trickling stream in the hollow of a shingly bed, a moving rainbow.

There is no doubt, one realises, that when left to herself Nature is a finer scenic artist than the whole Barbizon school rolled together.

But the finest sight of all is when the evening swoops down upon you and the shadows change with lightning rapidity.

Like a horde of Arab horsemen, the purple chases the orange dancing over the mountain-tops ; and the night settles down upon you like a heavy hand of black velvet.

After an inspection from the distance I thought I would run down into the native village, which I did. And what did I find ?

Nothing but a few old tumble-down mud houses with an occasional tatterdemalion man or boy lounging against the crumbling walls. Perhaps, though I doubt it, one-third of the houses were occupied. The actual town of El-Kantara is nothing more than a picturesque lie. There was only one decent house in the whole place, and it had an indefinable touch of modernity about it that I found hard to explain. The house worried me. A feeling came over me that I would give worlds to see the inside. What was to be done? Finally I jumped off my machine, opened the door of the courtyard and stepped in.

What a dream of calm, drowsy, quiet lay in the white-pillared colonnades. Low-arched windows with dainty arabesques ran round the walls. In the centre of the white-gravelled court splashed a pretty fountain to the accompanying of a silvery sound that harmonised in infinite charm with the shadows that were beginning to settle on the sheikh's delightful home. I marvelled how the artistic instinct of the native began to rise in the scale as one drew nearer the Sahara.

A door opened in a corner, and I turned to meet the comer. Was it the master or merely a servant coming to bid the roumi interloper to a hospitable cup of coffee. It was the master in the very flesh.

A Frenchman in white linen coat, with palette and mahl-stick! The very devil—no, I beg his pardon—the awakening spirit of the East! Now the secret was out.

The finest position in the whole oasis, the only house of truly Oriental magnificence, the only dwelling bearing the mantle of truly Eastern calm run—by a Frenchman! This is the regeneration of the native!!

I asked him if he could direct me to the hotel, which I had in actual fact somehow missed in my run through the gorge. With a courteous bow he explained that it was just on the other side. So with profuse apologies I pedalled back in hot haste. I had very genuine fear as to the amount of room available when once the gargantuan proportions of the Teutonic invaders had found a resting-place within its hospitable walls A fear, alas, but too well founded!

As I rode up to the nondescript collection of buildings that did duty for an hotel, I saw an all-too-familiar group standing round the mule train in the centre of the road.

"With infinite regrets, monsieur, but the last room had just been let to the party that came from arriving! The very last chamber indeed was let to the fat gentleman."

Wheugh! Beaten by a short head! How well were my gurgles and laughter revenged.

"But there is still one bed left in the hotel, if monsieur has no objection to sharing a room with a locataire, an employé in the post office."

I jumped at the chance, and went into dinner with an easy mind. After all, I had seen the modern spirit of the East at home, I had seen sunset in the Gorges of El-Kantara, I could easily forgive a minor triumph;

even the chug-chug of a train failed to disturb my equanimity.

After the meal was over I went for a stroll in the rich darkness. I was leaning up against the parapet of the old bridge—not, as one might think, revelling in a lust of poetry, but (shall I confess it ?) gurgling at intervals over the memories of the fat man on the donkey—when a still small voice sounded in my ear.

"Does monsieur want a guide to show him the Gorges of El-Kantara in the moonlight ?" A rough answer was on my tongue; but a certain velvet slyness in the voice checked me. I felt an interest in the vagabond.

"Monsieur will see what an excellent guide I shall make. I have failed at the Matriculation." One hears of curious recommendations from time to time; certainly anyone who seriously advances such an one as the above is worthy of closer scrutiny. My informant was a young man of about eighteen, clad in the usual burnous and yellow slippers; there was a sufficient pronounced brow and nose to make him not bad-looking on the whole.

"I have failed at the Matriculation," he continued, still more soothingly; "therefore I am a teacher of languages at Biskra. In the summer I shall go to Batna and teach the officers. I know all about Arabic and all about French. Monsieur is without doubt from Paris! I should like to go to Paris. In the meanwhile I will go to Biskra with monsieur and teach him Arabic. I assure you, monsieur, that I have failed at the Matriculation!"

"Are you married?" I cut in, to stem the breathless torrent.

"Ai! Ai!" he laughed gently. "I have already four children. I have divorced my wife. Women are the very devil." He was indeed de-naturalised, this young Mussulman who would talk about his womenkind 'coram populo.'

I tossed the fellow a coin. With a gentle laugh he slid quietly away into the gloom, leaving me to wonder who would fare worst, his wives or his pupils.

And so to bed. For some time I could not sleep. However, just as I was dropping off, the partner of my chamber let fall the water-jug. With a start and an oath I sat up in bed, one hand on my revolver. The sun was streaming gently through the window!! We both laughed. There was nothing for it but to get up and see about breakfast. The gallant caravan were already taking their stirrup-cup!

El-Kantara and its oasis are generally reckoned, I believe, to contain about three thousand inhabitants. Though the Aurès are occupied by Kabyles, you are here in Arab company, with its attendance of caids, moqadems, and the like.

Land occupied by the Arabs—generally cultivated by Kabyle hands, by the way—is divided into lands 'melk,' which the possessors enjoy by right of lusty deeds or immemorial occupation; lands 'arch,' ceded by the beys or sultans in return for rent; and lastly, common lands, where the nomads graze their flocks. As is only to be expected, cultivation is carried on in a very primitive manner, the rotation of crops and use of animal manure being practically unknown. Seed is sown in November or spring-time, and fifty days suffice to bring the barley to the ripe ear! Reaping goes forward slowly but surely under the primitive sickle, or even, in the mountains, by the still more primitive hand, the stubble being left long for the flocks to crop or to remain on the ground as manure. Land is reckoned by the 'zouidja' (about eight hectares), which is supposed to be the amount ploughable by a labourer and one yoke of oxen in one day.

Very skimpy indeed must be the living that the small owner drags from the soil; but insignificant as it is, it is not too small to be scientifically squeezed by the master hands of the marabouts and the caids. Of the former one may say that they operate in a manner time-honoured by the cloth. Every Arab has a hankering for the 'baraka,' or blessing, by personal touch of a saint or one of his descendants. He therefore takes full advantage of his right to visit the marabout to that end—and pays for it. There are also many other little matters in the way of subscriptions and so forth that can be, and are, solved on a cash basis, for great is the intricacy of the eternal economy of the zaouia.

Of the caids, one might lead off by saying that their skill in extortion is even greater than that of the marabouts—whence great jealousy. Though here again you get the softening balm of the aristocratic touch, for the caids of good family are by long practice enabled to pluck the fowl without making it holloa. A head caid may get anything from forty pounds a year to four hundred, which little sum he infinitely increases by the sale of honours, of decorations, by offerings at marriage and so forth. When the caid marries off one of his children and the snowy burnous is spread on the ground for offerings, as is always the case at a native wedding, woe betide the miserly cur who casts therein too small a coin for the occasion. The piece is abstracted and disdainfully returned to the shamefaced individual, who naturally, in his haste to cover the fault, gives again and lavishly. So much for the reputation of the big fish, of whom this may be said, however, that they give due value for their money and in general deliver the goods on order, so that a paternal Government has perhaps to wink its eye at much.

But when one comes to the little fish, the 'amins,' the 'mezouar,' the sheik, and the savour of their reputation in the nostrils of the Lord—Ai! Ai!

Yet here again it is the wicked who flourish and the virtuous who are cast down. The douar will combine with a perfectly astounding unanimity to get rid of an offensive and moderately honest caid by committing perjury with a gusto that is, perhaps, only possible in the East. At the same time they wriggle and squirm with a perfect content under the heel of a bully or a braggart. Awful and mysterious indeed are the ways of Allah! At least, that is the colonist's view.

Native officials, it is said, are like unto the locust of Kaliph Omar's day. The little creature happening one meal-time to alight on the Kaliph's table, the mighty Omar read cryptic signs upon its wings.

"I carry ninety eggs," ran the legend. "If I were to carry one hundred I would eat the world."

On leaving El-Kantara you may say with fairness that you leave the Aurès behind you. Legend and story would like to persuade you that in Roman times the surrounding land was a Garden of Eden, and assuredly, if ruins of aqueducts and barrages go for much, very strenuous attempts were made to irrigate the place effectively. There was in the old days a string of barrages from Laghouat to Biskra, and Pliny himself says that water was not lacking. But, as one writer has pointed out, the Romans knew as much about effective "writing up" as the most advanced journalists of the New York Yellow Press.

Anyway, the land takes up a curiously dry and orange-yellow look, whilst the purple of the distant hills looks very baked and dusty. You are at all times crossing and recrossing various oueds and the railway, for the mark of the globe-trotter is now deeply impressed on the land.

Not a drop of water anywhere in the watercourses, yet the worn smoothness of the stones speaks of a vast amount of tumbling and grinding that takes place when eventually the rain does come down.

To get to Biskra you have to pass two plains, of which the first is more or less of an oasis covered all over with pleasant palms and shelter; the second is simply and purely red desert. Half-way across number one you pass a delightful little place called El-Outaia. Feathery palms overhang the baking road; cool purple shadows nestle in the angles of the sun-dried walls. Farms cuddle shyly back in the embrace of sheltering bluey-green foliage. Altogether a dear little place—but perhaps a little bit risky and out of the way in times of native rising. Yes! If I were an inhabitant of El-Outaia, and was much blessed with the goods of this world, I think I should double-lock my door at night.

Close by El-Outaia, on the other side, is a large compound that goes by the name of the Ferme Dufour. It is surrounded by very high walls and closed gates, by tall graceful palms, by waving fields, by haystacks and the usual farm-gear of harrows and ploughs, etc. Altogether a pretty sight of bucolic prosperity. There is a sort of "j'y suis, j'y reste!" look about the place that must be eminently satisfying to the French mind. To balance the picture and that nothing might be lacking in the moral effect, close by under the wing of Dufour, as it were, lay a gourbi-like molehill on the ground. Feeling rather inclined for a rest I sat down on the coolest side of the haystack, donned my veil, and watched the back tyre of the "Pug" flatten out with a sort of lazy indifference. It would perhaps have been impossible under other circumstances, but when you are near the haunts of man, and can get water for the asking, so small a matter as a puncture is robbed of nine-tenths of its terrors. I was just in the midst of a most delightful argument with myself as to whether I should rest first and mend after, when a couple of white-robed boys strolled lazily from the clump of mud-and-wattle dwellings. They came to stare at me with a perfect courtesy. One was about sixteen, the son and heir as I should say; the other perhaps a couple of years older, bearing the marks of the privileged servant—impudent, yet perhaps not too sure of his position.

Not a word was said; the boy dropped on to the straw beside me whilst his henchman returned to discuss me with the other hinds.

When manna drops from heaven it should not be lightly passed by. As my companion knew no word of French, our conversational efforts were somewhat restrained; it will therefore be readily understood that I had some difficulty in making him comprehend that what I really did want was *not* a mass of sticky couscous, however redolent of the soil, but a pannikin of clear water. But eventually I got it by the hand of the elder.

They watched me strip the tyre with sympathy. I know I fell several degrees in their estimation by such an exhibition of mechanical skill; but what is the poor roumi to do? The fidgety Western soul for ever exposes its little weaknesses in the battle with Fate. The East, which is entirely on the side of Kismet, enjoys the cat-and-mouse spectacle to the full.

We parted with a friendly wave of the hand, for it was time I got under way again. Numerous caravans came swinging by with much raising of dust. Flopping, ungainly, rope-galled camels, carrying enormous packs, or maybe an awning-like tent, doubtless containing some precious gem of the opposite sex from Bou Saada or any of the great Sahara routes that converge on Biskra.

Just as I was starting on what might very properly be called the last lap, namely, the red desert that I mentioned before, I came upon an Arab mounted on a beautiful black horse caparisoned with silver and red morocco trappings. He took my direction, so that it was easy to see he was Biskra bound. Though he took all the "traverses," yet I always managed to catch up along some stretch of level, so that it very soon developed into an informal race for the Col de Sfa, from which for the first time you look down upon the boundless horizon of the Desert.

It was something to look forward to after the terrible monotony of the scorched red-yellow earth that went to form all the surrounding landscape. Even the very stones of the twisting, winding oueds looked dull and bored with life.

Close upon the Col itself we came upon a marriage party dancing and singing and waving palm-branches, headed by a cavalier. He was an old grey-beard who most certainly knew how to carry himself. How his mount could stand the infernal din that was going on will ever be a wonder to me, for the black Arab began to plunge and carry on like one possessed; indeed, more than once I thought horse and rider would go rolling down the hill-side. Eventually my companion accepted fate, and decided to watch the passing show from afar off; it was that that gave me my winning lead to the crest. When I had managed to slip by the leaping boys and the gesticulating elders with their gay vestments, I turned to consider the plain over which I had come; the arid confines of Algeria, the uttermost word in scorching inhospitality, yet somehow palpitating with the feeling of ancient culture.

On the other side of the Col lay the Sahara, the savage, the wild, the wonderful! Barbarism undiluted, the home of every lust born in the heart of man. What would it be like?

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOME OF BLOOD AND FIRE

FAR away into the infinite distance, before one's eyes stretches a carpet of dull greeny-blue, not a mound, not a hill in sight. In colour and whole appearance it is like a great ocean spread at your feet. Close beneath you on the shore of this calm untroubled sea, as it were, lies Biskra, with its twinkling white houses lying cool in the shade of its waving palms. A jewel of the Sahara! One's very mouth waters at the sight. Cast your eye to the right and the left down the long range of the Zab and the Aurès, the shores of this vast ocean-like expanse. Mark the dry, parched earth, and the palpitating heat. Then think of the kindly shade of Biskra and descend. Descend judiciously withal, for the road is somewhat windy and precipitous in places. Be especially careful if you are racing an Arab who takes the "traverses."

You are close to Biskra! You are into it! You—are—into—Biskra!! You gasp!

A particularly business-like red-brick railway station marks the road in to the left; a hideous factory chimney spoils the effect towards the right; the general appearance of the buildings, public and otherwise, is that of a second-rate French town. From every corner, from every stone, spring up pestiferous Arab boys and guides who pursue you hot-foot the length of your journey. An acrid dust sweeps down your throat and clogs your nostrils, the heat beats down upon you like a hot oven. How you long for the cool slopes of the Aurès ! You would even be content with any of the lesser infernos of the plains.

You have in all probability very foolishly pitched upon your hotel beforehand, and regard your future comfort as settled. By a very natural sequence of events, on enquiry you find that the last chamber has been taken but the very moment before you arrived. In the heat of despair you sit down in an adjoining café, perhaps, to consider the decree of fate in all its bearings. Then the avenging angels descend upon you in the shape of battalions of shoe-blacks. In sheer weariness of mind you let them wreak their will upon you, if you have no cotton wherewith to stuff your ears. Unless you keep a careful watch on your feet and a stern frown upon your brow, you may have your shoes well-nigh worn through by rubbing in as little a time as it takes to write this. Timing things by my watch, a chronometer, I timed five cleanings in the five minutes.

Having finally reached a conclusion as to the best course of action to pursue, I got up so sharply as to upset the last of these human locusts, and strode manfully towards the door.

Then I changed my mind and returned towards the comptoir, where I demanded of the good patron as to which was the hotel most frequented by army men. I have always found that the military set have a particular care for their stomachs. Subsequent events showed the wisdom of my proceeding.

When I reached the Hôtel des Palmiers I had already concluded that about two days of this sort of life would lay me in an early and entirely undeserving grave, so I made my plans accordingly. I decided also to lose no time in routing out my friend Thomson, if by any chance he had been sufficiently foolish to stay so long in this dusty oven. Wisely he had departed.

But first let me say that I more or less explored the hotel, and found it quite delightful. The front overlooked the only tolerable place in Biskra, the Jardin Publique and the Jardin de la Garnison with the church a little to the left. Being a mere cyclist I was, of course, relegated to the back—but in a modified degree of obscurity, one that I willingly endured. I was ensured a reasonable quiet in conjunction with a quite charming vista of lime-washed wall covered with delightful climbing purple creepers. A sweet scent came drifting into the room which reminded one, curious to relate, far more of an old Elizabethan garden than that of a sun-baked oasis on the confines of the Sahara. As directly in the rear of the hotel was a barracks of Senegalese, the 5th, I believe, a lively and regular "tarata-tarata" kept me well posted as to the hours of the day and night. So much for my own chamber.

The bright little salle-à-manger presented its own points of interest. There was a festive party of elderly tourists and their wives. Blue, khaki, and white jackets dotted the room with bright spots of colour; for the military were in strong force, in accordance with the French regulations which make the "mess" a practical non-existent.

What a pleasant relief from the sober broadcloth of the somewhat heavy party of lawyers and merchants and the toilettes bourgeoises of their still more sober wives.

It will have been already gathered that my hostel was not one of the elect, a by-word from New York to Petersburg; it was merely good. Hence there were no ladies finishing out the fag-end of a season on unpaid-for gowns from Worth and Paquin. To be still more painfully truthful, I do not think that in the whole room there was a single one of us in evening dress. But for all that we had our own little pleasures. When the ladies of the party rose from the table they disappeared discreetly and left the men-folk to their own devices. A wink of infinite subtlety went the round of the jolly red faces; the jolliest rose gently from the table and the rest followed his example. Together they stole out of the restaurant in a manner that can only be described as sneakish. Now, when a dozen eminently respectable, elderly gentlemen steal silently forth in the dead of night, there is, to the casual eye even, something of note on the tapis. Such tactics were really too much for me, and I felt compelled to follow.

I followed them to a café near at hand; one, it would appear, well patronised by the nobility and gentry of the neighbourhood. My victims sat together round a long table, and I sat close by. It was very quietly joyful in that brightly-lit brasserie, all thrown open to the drifting air and somewhat pungent Eastern odour. Arrangements had evidently been made in one corner for a cinematograph show in the course of the evening (how ubiquitous is the flickering film!), so the guests were more or less relegated to one side of the room. Close by me sat a couple of red-coated officers of the Spahis, sipping their coffee and taking a hand at écarte. A little further off lounged a white-bearded sheikh in a beautiful sky-blue burnous and a scarlet jacket heavily braided in gold; he was finished off by the most exquisite red morocco knee-boots shod with the usual black slipper and armed at the heel with shining silver spurs. He gravely saluted the more prominent of the visitors and sipped forbidden liquors.

My gallant twelve drew closer together round their table, whilst the grey-beards wagged solemnly. Suddenly there was a burst of rich deep laughter from the leader, a fat man, tempered with a sharp cackle from a ferrety-faced little fellow whom I took to be a lawyer. I pricked up my ears.

" Par exemple, la-la ! " cried a third. " Mais, en effet, on est loin de Paris ! "

" Et pourtant, à Biskra il faut le point de vue—saharien ! " Again that subtle smile went the round.

" A qui mieux mieux. Moi je pense au guide de l'hôtel ! "

" Et moi ! " And so the deep-laid plot was fixed up. And my appetite was thoroughly whetted.

When they had set off with the guide, I slipped out after them as quietly as might be. Alas for the depravity of the human race ! They would have effectively given me the slip had it not been that I noticed, far down the narrow street to which their steps were bent, the unmistakable signs of a café maure. Alas for me that I have seen elderly gentlemen of jolly face in the hands of a crafty guide before. I, also, bent my steps towards that narrow street—and made a bee-line for the café.

If there is one thing I detest it is dodging people—so I hurried on ahead and got into the café first.

You find yourself in a long, low white-washed room of very greyish hue ; from the ceiling are suspended naked kerosene lamps of a penetrating odour ; around the walls are lined bare forms where you sit and perspire and drink coffee of an extremely cheap order at an extremely exorbitant price. Half-way down one side of the room is a raised dais on which sit the musicians, making a droning music of an infinitely wearying order —at least to Western ears ; as instruments the musicians favour flutes, tambourines, and drums—especially drums—which keep time with the dancer's humour, and eventually rouse her to a frenzy at a franc or so per hour. The whole centre of the room is of a bare earth left free for the girls.

Up and down the middle of the floor sway the perspiring maidens, clad in multi-coloured petticoats with a rather stiff, white, transparent gauze over-dress. Some are young and pretty, with a sort of golden skin; presumably Levantines down for the season. Others are of a darker hue—Ouléd Nails (?) But the majority are old and fat, and more resemble an obese porpoise in their movements than a diabolic priestess of Astarte, from whom they are piously supposed to take their profession. But there you are, of course; you have come to watch, and watch you must—in hopes. I was just observing the gaudy handkerchiefs that bound their hair, and the rather graceful movement with which they made play with a handkerchief which they tossed from hand to hand, when my friends the twelve apostles made their entry.

There was an instant though unostentatious commotion as they were conducted to a bench of honour, which made me the more thankful for the secluded seat I myself had chosen in anticipation.

When everything was satisfactorily settled a fresh damsel took the floor, and presented her variety of the danse du ventre (every item on the programme is some modification of this highly æsthetic " turn ").

She danced with no little grace; there was a good deal of skill in her method; furthermore she was young, pretty, and fresh, so she went to partake of some coffee with the heroic band. Certainly there is much to be said for uncorseted loveliness that sways to the tinkle of heavy silver bangles.

Something interesting was under discussion, for the guide spoke earnestly. He obviously impressed his flock, the girl added her comments. Another young lady was called to the consultation. The rest of us, black and white alike, looked on stolidly. A phrase caught my ear: "C'est la danse véritable du Sahara, môssieu, je vous assure." The grey-beards looked at one another, from each other to the guide. First one and then the other rose to his feet. Silently they filed out. The two girls slipped away. A gentle Eastern smile went round the café. I got up and left—my evening's work was done.

. . . . . .

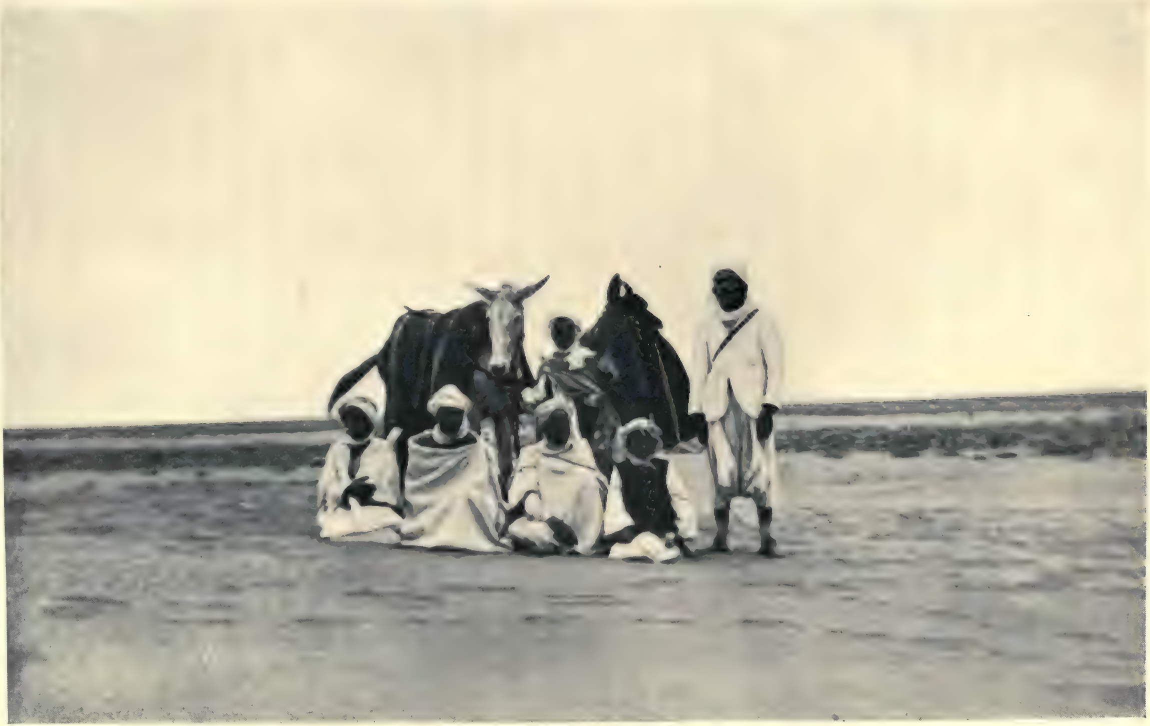
For some little time I had resisted the attempts of Ismail, the guide, to penetrate the solitudes of the desert. An expedition, it appeared, was the essential feature of a visit to Biskra. To do the thing properly, I was soon given to understand, there was only one way; and that was to hire a caravan of beautiful camels—such, for instance, as one saw outside the Palace Hotel, with their bright canopies and gaudy tassels. There would, of course, be several servants, and Ismail would be commander-in-chief of the staff, to say nothing of official flogger-on.

Indeed, the whole thing was practically arranged before I had the chance of interposing a syllable. When that syllable developed into an emphatic repudiation of the whole business, the expression of Pasha Ismail's face would have led to instant decapitation in more romantic days. But his exhortations had a certain effect. The spirit of adventure rose within me and—I compounded for a mule-ride. That was before I had any experience of Saharian mules.

On one eventful morning a fifteenth cousin of Ismail's turned up at the hotel with a mule train, *i.e.*, two decrepit mules, raw as to the rump and rope-galled. Ismail salaamed.

Behold—and wonder, oh môssieu, at the marvels of the Sahara. A saddle! but who uses a saddle on the Sahara? The true Bedouin rides on a sack; even as môssieu! Regard how the ends have been slit to make most excellent stirrups for the feet. Slip? Yes, a little slipping is unavoidable until one is well accustomed to the balance. And the bridle? Would môssieu believe Ismail of the unsullied lips? The true Bedouin never uses a bridle of aught but rope—even as môssieu! Spirit? The mules are bursting with spirit! But in the meanwhile would môssieu take this little switch. It is only on the limitless sands of the Sahara that the mules develop their best paces.

With considerable assistance I was hoisted into the



MY SAHARAN ESCORT

insecure position of humpty-dumpty—and as promptly had a great fall. Happily a second attempt was more successful. At last I was astride my courser of the desert. I was mounted, like Richard, upon a sorry mule. Ismail thought it wiser to follow behind. But first he asked me whether I would not like the fifteenth cousin to run before and clear the way as a lictor. Modesty compelled me to forbid.

With characteristic Eastern forethought he purchased sundry oranges from another cousin, wherewith we might regale ourselves on the way. Finally all was ready. I gave the signal!

We ambled gently out of the Jardin Publique and down the road, myself feeling for the time being far from comfortable on my primitive seat. I suspect that I afforded much covert amusement to the gently-smiling Ismail; but the proprieties were at least outwardly observed. There was no raucous laughter such as one might hear at home.

The street consisted of shops of the sort to be found on the side streets of a minor French town. It was slightly more romantic when we struck the Touggourt road. For a time one gets on very nicely, a bit dusty, it is true, but steady-going for all that.

Then you start on the grand adventure. You plunge into the desert—at least partially.

Exactly what happened was this. We dived down sundry side streets, peculiarly dirty and narrow; then we cut across to the railway that runs right out into the desert. Our romantic course lay partly on the iron way itself, partly on the sloping banks thereof, and partly on a desolate track covered with a kind of inferior tufted, camel-grass.

The mule required considerable persuasion. First we travelled on the sand, then on the embankment path, then on the railway itself, and finally, on all three together. My mount was beaten and flogged and flummoxed, with the result that eventually he broke into the gentlest of trots; but soon subsided with a sigh, and we continued to walk as before. All the while I was wondering when the beautiful dunes of the infinite Sahara were going to appear. Far away to the left stretched the telegraph poles that border the line to Touggourt.

I suppose some day we shall shake off the dust of Biskra from our feet without the shadow of a regret, skedaddle south to Touggourt as the latest figment of society's imagination, and bore ourselves at the Casino as before.

Meanwhile we are in search of the Desert, the real thing, which the tribe Beni-Ismail are at pains to discover for us in every tuft of camel-grass, so as to get back early and catch another 'mug.'

On the road Ismail showed a surprising interest in the British Army; whilst, as ever, the subject of Mr. Robert Hichens—Môssieu Robéritch—urged him to redoubled fluency. For Ismail read his kith and kin. Mr. Hichens evidently has in a marked degree the true pioneer's faculty of endearing himself to the native-born.

At last, with a triumphant flourish of his stick and a yell that nearly made my quadruped fall off the embankment, Ismail cried: "There are the dunes!"

I scanned the horizon hard with straining eyes, and saw nothing in particular. The guide waved frantically towards my right, on which were two or three utterly lilliputian sandhills where a couple of carriages, a crowd of Arab touts, together with one sorry camel, were gathered together. On the top of this mountain of sand I saw the white flutter of a woman's skirt. At last my mind rose to the situation and the hour.

I was in the presence of the Sahara!

With a Sioux war-cry and a welt from the switch that no bird, beast, or fish could deny, we swung round and cantered slowly—very slowly—towards our goal. A sweating, panting mass, we tumbled up to the summit, and metaphorically unsaddled. Hungry-eyed, I scanned the horizon—one or two sand-dunes; a carpet of dirty green stretching as far as the eye could see. The matchless Sahara!!

When I had extracted all the possibilities of the situation, sucked an orange, watched some very uncomfortable-looking tourists arrive on the backs of sorely-tried camels, I sat me down on the sand to gather my impressions; that, presumably, being the correct thing to do.

I rather think the telegraph poles spoilt my impression; without them, perhaps I might have been willing to believe in the infinite vastness of the Desert Sea. Or was it the orange peel on the sand?

One touch! As I sat disconsolate, surrounded by human vultures, a lonely camel with its rider came striding up from the west, slipped away behind us, heading for Sidi Okbar, the Holy City. Where from, and whither away? Was its dusky freight an emissary of a coming Leader—or was he merely a usurer in search of cash?

Seeing me look so disconsolate, Ismail tried the magic of an ostrich hunt, or at least a dramatic account of one.

It would appear that there are two methods of hunting the ostrich during the months of July and August, when the feathers are marketable. There is the manly method, where you ride them down; and there is the mean method, when you play upon their kindly domestic feelings.

As an Englishman, the first method is naturally the one that appeals to one the most, and it was upon that Ismail expended the finer flowers of his rhetoric.

In the months of July and August, the hottest time of the year, you select your horse, which should be exceedingly sound of wind and limb. You then proceed to give him about a month's training in this wise: feed him every day on oats—nothing but oats; give him a very small quantity of water to drink, just sufficient to wash the dust down, in fact. Then, every

A LONELY CAMEL WITH ITS RIDER

day, during the hottest part thereof, mount him and gallop—like hell! Not the ordinary pleasant tittup of the riding-school; but a mad, crazy, tearing gallop. You are in training to ride down an ostrich. When your gee has lost all his stomach and every possible ounce of flesh, you and your fellow-hunters, to the number of some ten or a dozen, similarly mounted and accompanied by a sufficient train of servants, set off into the heart of the desert, where the ostriches live and thrive. You are each armed with a stick about four feet long, to the end of which is fastened a knob of some three pounds' weight. Then you dream of the glories to come.

Arrived at the haunt of the ostrich you pitch your camp, whilst the most rusé of your servants is sent off to spy upon the birds. In due course the good news comes of a find. The whole party of you slips gently down upon the unsuspecting party. With a wild yell you burst in upon them. The ostriches tuck up their skirts and scutter; but first they run in circles, collecting their thoughts like frightened old women. That is the time to catch them.

Each cavalier pursues one bird. You've got to ride him down before he breaks for the open; for if you don't, you won't catch him this side of Lake Chad. Suppose, however, that your oats and your galloping have done their work, that you are actually coming upon the bird, then you get ready with your 'coaxer,' and as you come alongside you let him have it upon the head. He falls. Down you spring, the feathers are yours. The day is won. You stroke your horse's neck, you feel your strong right arm, and enviously count your neighbour's gains.

So much for method number one. Now for method number two.

According to Ismail's remarks, this appears much the more commendable from a practical point of view; though it seems but a sorry act to make use of the domestic virtues to ensure the downfall of both husband and wife; for that is what it amounts to. Briefly it is this:—

The bold bad hunter spies upon the ostrich family and waits until hubby is away feeding, leaving his cherished helpmeet upon the nest. Then the b.b.h. draws near to the lady. In natural fright, she flies away to tell her partner. Meanwhile the b.b.h. digs himself a nice little hole in the sand, of such depth that he can just see over the edge when sitting in his ambush. By the time the b.b.h. has completed all his plans, the lady has reached her husband and received a sound thrashing for being such a fool. Very disgusted at such treatment, she comes home in a huff, taking no more notice of the objectionable stranger.

Time passes, and hubby comes to take *his* turn at the nest. Having been apprised by the wife at the presence of the b.b.h., and having decided offhand that the same is harmless, pride prevents him taking any further notice of the matter; so he quietly settles down to his duties whilst the lady goes off to find what food she may. It is now that the snake in the grass or the scorpion in the sand, whichever you like, strikes his deadly blow. With consummate skill the b.b.h. trains his gun so as to shoot the ostrich through the legs—to disable him in such a manner that no blood shall touch the feathers. End of Papa Ostrich! When the lady returns she is dealt with in like manner; and so the sad history ends.

Such was the information given me by Ismail. We will there let it rest and pass to more kindly topics.

But before finally leaving the subject, I would certainly say that it has more of the appearance of truth than the report published in certain of the older historians, such as Herodotus, who would have us believe that the whole Sahara was once a fertile plain, well watered by the Oued Igharghar; before the Mountains of the Ahaggar came into being and destroyed the river by cutting it in two.

It is said, however, in this connection, that the Touaregs have memories of vast troops of oxen crossing the Desert. It is reported that they can even remember the pasturages that fed the beasts by the wayside.

To take a long jump. Stories of vast wealth seem to grow with exceeding rapidity under a hot sun. Not so long ago the idea was broached in all seriousness that the Sahara was one vast sapphire (?) mine! That all you had to do to be an instant millionaire was to form a company for the collecting of the precious stones!!

Whether the company was actually formed or not I could not say; but the incident strongly reminds me of a certain plausible gentleman who once came into my ken. He lived, if I remember rightly, for six months at his landlady's expense on the strength of a supposed ruby mine in Patagonia. When finally the wretch was ejected with violence, the lady apologised to him, and put down the whole sad business to marital duress! The abiding belief of the French in the everlasting wealth of the Sahara has something of the same note in it.

SOME OLD-WORLD GARDEN

CHAPTER XIX

OLD BISKRA

MANY varieties of grain and fruit have been tried in the precincts of Biskra and the surrounding oases, but without success. What, however, really does multiply and grow fat is the date. Here you strike upon a fit subject for a pæan in any language. The wealth of date-palms may easily be conceived when it is understood that the same has to support a tax of one franc per foot of height. As many of them grow to a hundred feet the tax is far from being unprolific, especially when one considers that the number of palms is multiplied by the number of feet, and there are some six million date-palms altogether in the surrounding oases, counting, of course, male and female trees. Its best yieldings are from the age of eight to a hundred. The pollen of the male tree is grafted on to the female tree by hand; that is to say a young gentleman of dusky hue shins up a date-tree by the aid of a rope, extracts some of the pollen of the male tree with a fine brush, then purveys the same to the heart of the female tree, and—the thing is done! The yield of fruit is about eight thousand kilogrammes per hectare.

Dates are much used by the merchants for the South who are desirous of obtaining a fair return for their labours. Caravan after caravan in the date trade comes swinging up from somewhere at the back of beyond, passes through Biskra, and heads straight for the bled and Sétif.

At Sétif the knowing merchant sells his dates for twice their value at home. Then he packs up his traps, invests his money in corn, and departs for the South. Arrived home, he disposes of his corn at twice the price it fetches at Sétif. So this guileless child of the desert has made precisely three hundred per cent. profit on his transaction! Which, after all, even in these days is not to be sneezed at.

The same appreciation of high percentage quickly made was apparent in the transactions of a small gutter urchin, who sold me some trifle or other; then backed up the transaction with a most barefaced attempt to do me out of three-halfpence in the change by bolting. Fortunately I caught him and made him disgorge. This was in Old Biskra, through which we rode on our way back—hot, tired, and dusty.

Whilst Sidi Okbar is a very sacred city, no one in his sober senses could possibly so describe Biskra. But still, when you have got rid of the atmosphere of hotels there is much to be enjoyed as you pass slowly through the narrow, winding, mud-walled lanes, with an occasional glimpse into some old-world garden of palm cactus and bush of small degree. By the side

GOING ON A VISIT TO FRIENDS

of the lane lies a broad ditch down which trickles water of a picturesque but unhealthy appearance, spanned ever and anon by some tiny bridge leading to a still more winding way.

If you are in luck you will from time to time come across some small infants bathing in the cooling stream in a state of innocent and shameless nature. For the sake of a sou or other small coin they will willingly don the habiliments of respectability and come from the purple shadows into the golden sunshine. You may perhaps catch them in an arch of overhanging trees of deep olive-green, with a background of hard opal sky and a foreground of pinky ochre, where the palpitating heat beats down upon parched earth.

Or you may meet an old grandfather in flowing burnous driving before him a quick-stepping little donkey, laden with any sort of bundle that is twice as big as itself.

Perhaps you may even see a white-robed lady in haik and foutah, going on a visit to friends, to the accompanying tinkle of bracelets and anklets, accompanied by the faithful Fatimah in much more gaudy attire. In all probability Fatimah is blackest of black, with a huge mouth, big swinging earrings, and a penchant for scarlet and gold. Almost certainly she will be carrying on her head a large jar of sweetmeat or other delicacy for the pleasure of her mistress's hostess. They pass you on the way down Main Street, and you wonder into which of the deep silent doorways they will slip, unobserved of all but Allah. Main Street is very largely composed of the backs of houses, with here and there an arch that overspans the way, spreading beneath it a pleasant shade. There are not many such arches in Main Street, but such as there are you will find well patronised by idlers of every description, who puff leisurely the inevitable cigarette. They squat on their haunches or lounge on the steps and eye the passing roumi with a wholly unpleasant contempt, a contempt echoed in your treatment by the inevitable urchins or youth, who will insist on diving for sous, wherever you come across a group of chattering boys at a stream bend in this old dust-yellow town.

One of the points in Ismail's character was his air of absolute assurance, even when he had committed the blackest of crimes. No matter what scandalous dereliction of duty this son of the Sahara had been guilty of, he had always on the tip of his tongue a suggested plan more infamous than the last. It will then be the more easily understood that after our retreat from the desert and my consequent expression of opinion at the conduct of the whole campaign, he should immediately turn upon me with:

"I knew monsieur would not like it. It is not an expedition such as monsieur is in reality cut out for."

"Well, Son of Eblis, and what sort of expedition am I in reality cut out for." You will see the treacherous cavity that opened beneath my feet.

THROUGH THE NARROW MUD-WALLED LANES

"If monsieur will take my advice, he will permit of me, his most devoted servant, procuring the finest caravan obtainable in Biskra"—I remembered the mules and shuddered—"and monsieur shall choose two of the finest dancers in the town. Then together we will plunge into the depths of the Sahara."

I nearly fainted; but, happily, feelings of horror engendered by an honest and sturdy parentage came to my rescue. Seeing there was nothing to be done with the reprobate I turned slowly on my heel.

Being now thrown entirely on to my own resources, I hoped that there might be some chance of seeing the local wonders in a decent and Christian way. I accordingly planned an excursion through the old town and the adjoining city of Sidi Okbar all on my own. My plans in no way at all included the immoral Ismail; for which lack of consideration, as you will see later, he was duly revenged.

By ways that are circuitous and devious you eventually emerge from the warren and return to your hotel to refresh, perhaps, your memory of Eastern romance, by the perusal of some authoritative book on the subject. And so the heat of the day passes.

You dream about the militant missionaries, those enthusiasts in white and red so unjustly called the 'soldats de carnaval,' because of their white tunic and pantaloons, their red cap and girdle; according to your cast of mind, you class them with the stars of opéra-bouffe, or you remember in the same instant the Jesuit of the Redskins in the pre-Fenimore Cooper days.

Personally, I prefer the smell of the woods that comes drifting down, say, the St. Lawrence as the short twilight closes in and the Northern Lights begin to dance. But there is no accounting for taste, and likely there are many in whom the acrid smoke of camel-dung raises feelings that cannot be denied. Be that as it may, amongst the Arab or the Redskin, the missionary goes forth to live or die filled with the same light of hope. The one and the other they gamble for souls against an early, unpleasant death; and, incidentally, they can handle an épée with most officers on the Eastern frontier. As you begin to think about the confréries—you suddenly wake up! Time for a sluice, an apéritif, and dinner.

Speaking of myself, after I honoured Old Biskra with a visit, I dropped into the Casino in the evening. I threw a coin or two, then I retired to the lounge to spend the next half-hour in observing the visitors, chiefly hotel people, militaires, and such-like folk.

By turning-in time I was heartily sick of the whole place, so I slipped off quietly in the hopes of a healthy night's rest. Man proposes, but Allah disposes. It could certainly not have been at more than fifty yards from the Casino that a soft voice in my ear, a dread voice of hideous portent, whispered:

"Would monsieur like to see a 'danse nègre'?"

"Ismail, have I not said that I will have no more of you and your wicked ways ; ways that are indeed the ways of Sheitan, the Devil ? "

" Môssieu, but this is not ordinary ' danse.' It is a marriage 'danse'; very few tourists have seen a marriage dance. But then, I said to myself, monsieur is not an ordinary tourist. I feel sure that monsieur will like the negresses." I looked hard into his eyes for the sparkling light of sarcasm, but in vain ; either it was absent or too well screened by the lust for gold.

Reflecting that the negro village was near whilst the hotel was far, and that in any case Ismail was only to be shaken off by actual flight, I surrendered myself with a sigh. Actually we found the rare and ravishing sight on the Place, a lop-sided quadrangular affair in the heart of the negro quarter.

Very many people were gathered together ; to such a degree, indeed, that the nearer we approached, the more difficult it seemed to me to conceive of the average tourist missing it by any means whatever. Any possibility of secrecy being finally disposed of by the furious noise of the reggs.

We came upon the singular sight round the corner of a narrow street, hemmed in by tumble-down hovels of sun-dried earth or ' doub ' ; and the flickering light of the torches threw a smoky, ape-like, expression on to the heavy features of the squatting multitude. On the left hand as we joined the circle was the orchestra of drums and pipes and so forth. On the right sat the bridal party and relations. If I remember rightly I was informed that the bride herself was about twelve and the bridesmaids of corresponding ages. But I am very sorry to say the interest did not centre so much in her and her small friends as in the more or less free entertainment that was going forward. There were several dancers clad in the most astounding of brilliant garments, and led, of course, by a queen of the ballet, who looked like a hippotamus let loose. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin"; even the light and merry negro does nothing for nothing—and precious little for twopence. Above all, dancers must live. So whilst the tom-toms thundered on and the flute droned with a wheeze that was but little better than that of the bagpipes, the master of the ceremonies made pretty little speeches, various male relatives of the interested parties also talking, and the onlookers swayed approval. Then it was explained to me by Ismail that Allah had been peculiarly beneficent to me in that here to hand lay an easy, and withal cheap, method of obtaining the immediate approval of all the gods and devils of Africa. I had, it appeared, only to cast a small piece of money into the cloth spread on the ground, when immediately the master of the ceremonies would beatify me in appropriate phrase, and the dancers blind my eyes with the rhythm of their gestures. The bargain was too great a one to be resisted, so into the ring spun a coin.

Everyone was as good as his word. Only Ismail looked depressed. I feel sure that coin ought to have

AN OLD GRANDFATHER IN FLOWING BURNOUS

passed through his hands. Then, at any rate, some would have stuck to the right place. However that may be, no sooner had the M.C. blessed me with such ease and fluency as to lend to the belief that I was not the first stranger thus honoured, than the dance swung forward and swayed up and down with the inevitable body motion of the East. They crooned a dirge, which I was told in strict confidence was a hymn of thanks, spontaneously composed and directed to my address—the great Lord, Sultan, and Emir, now standing in their midst. I naturally wanted to hear a lot of it.

It was really quite fascinating to watch as the smoky torch-light threw flickering shadows over the heavy animal gestures of these strange beings. From time to time an eerie light would show up some distant part of the square, making the monkey figures of the lookers-on jump and shake in truly fantastic fashion. Ismail gently pulled me by the arm; I woke from a sort of reverie. My mentor suggested that we should be going. What he really meant to say was that more dancing meant more money, and for the moment he had lost hold of the purse-strings.

" Môssieu," he whispered, " I can show you much better to-morrow, I will take you to see the bride herself at home! Many visitors have paid large sums for such an honour, but I, Ismail, can arrange it for——" he looked at me.

Said I : " I am going to bed ! "

CHAPTER XX

THE HOLY CITY

SO much had been told me about the curiosities of Sidi Okba, the Holy, that when I was beating about for a sanctuary from the importunities of the various touts that ever haunt an hotel gate, it was as a matter of course that I should immediately consider the possibilities of the place.

It was a question of getting off fairly early, for the road was reported to be none of the best, and I was not at all keen on riding in the heat of the day. Besides, it was advisable to get home in time to enjoy a douche at the particularly Roman baths they have at Biskra.

I do not think I have ever been on anything quite so bad as that road to Sidi Okba, and I am justified in saying that I have been on some of the most awful roads in the world. One runs out of Biskra past the Casino, the Royal Hotel, through the negro quarter, and across the bed of the Oued Abdi, which is large and dry and stony. There is a pretty well-defined road across the oued; but still, from observation, I would not be prepared to say that the occupants of the Okba diligence really enjoyed themselves in the crossing. Presumably the uncomfortable feeling that

THAT ROAD TO SIDI OKBA

one has in crossing this large dry river-bed is much the same as the one that the Israelites had in crossing the Red Sea. A wheel came off the diligence in the process; from the amount of recrimination, you would think that it was the rearguard of the Jewish column with the Egyptians hot on their track.

Once clear of the oued you have nothing to contend with but the sand, which lies fairly deep on the road in places, and the inevitable wind which meets you whichever way you turn, fulfilling a double duty of making you tired and at the same time filling your lungs with a constant stream of sandy grit.

For the whole distance you run with the Aurès on your left; on your right is nothing but a most uninteresting bumpy flatness of camel-grass. When you come across a domestic camel nourishing her young by the wayside you welcome it as being above all things romantic. It is probable that if you are a tourist you will take a photograph, as I did. Merely to catch sight of a little urchin naked as the day he was born, and following hard on the track of two goats, is a joy unto the eye.

All the while the sun is getting up and you are getting hot about the neck. Soon the sand begins to shimmer before your eyes. You press forward against the constant strong breeze of sandy wind. Suddenly you look up. Lo and behold, you are on the outskirts of Sidi Okba! Sidi Okba the religious—I had almost said the cathedral—City of the Zibans.

As usual, you are guarded front and rear by lazy urchins who ought to be at school, you are flanked by guides who ought to be in an even warmer place; your thirst grows at an appalling rate as you are piloted through the winding flues of this dusty oven, and your finest efforts in search of a drink result in your fetching up at the mosque. Then you have to start again with an ever-growing crowd at your heels of evil-smelling loafers, ranging in colour from jet-black to a delicate snuff-colour, clad in every species of tattered cloak that could by any stretch of imagination be possibly called burnous. The guides shout "Belek!" and you shout, "Damn!" With every step it becomes more difficult to get rid of the pests. You charge your way through the crowded, squabbling, market-place, taking no notice, I am sorry to say, of the picturesqueness of the hucksters squatting in what little shade is to be obtained from the low mud buildings; you upset one or two white-robed sons of the desert; you again dive into the crowded, winding lanes; you squeeze past the swaying camel-packs of the slow-moving caravans that can just, themselves, pass through the tortuous ways with the brushing away of an awning or two; you pass innumerable shops selling every conceivable commodity in their funny little open windows, under the shade of what is, as often as not, a mere sack stretched across two poles. At last, after an infinity of running and searching, you come to your journey's

THE CROWDED, SQUABBLING, MARKET-PLACE

end—the only European shop in the place! There you retire into the garden and demand edibles of some sort. So you munch biscuits and drink sticky lemonade whilst watching the patron, the patronne, and the lodger, a very youthful schoolmaster, enjoying a most savoury ragout. The sight of it soon becomes too much for you. Thereupon you take a turn round the kitchen garden, in the hope of slipping out quietly, unbeknown to the guides. False illusion! All the world and his son is waiting for you outside the gate. So there is nothing for it but the stern voice of authority.

Having in my wild rush through the city mastered the run of one or two main streets, I managed to reach my goal, the mosque, without assistance. But there I was held up, and perforce had to tell one of the hangers-on to go and fetch me the mufti that I might view the interior.

The East resembles the West very much in certain things. The House of God is often closed lest His children shall steal therefrom.

Whilst someone went to fetch the good man from his siesta, I had leisure to survey the exterior, the great white colonnade with its heavy pillars and deep shade where the beggars sit in clusters. From the roof of a neighbouring house I photographed the mosque, as is the time-honoured custom of the tourist. Unfortunately it is so difficult to get far enough away to get a perspective view. The minaret is rather fine, and the whole thing glitters with a most pleasant and refreshing whiteness that contrasts excellently with the deep green of the feathery palms.

This mosque, I believe, is one of the very few in Africa that can be visited by the infidel; and even such grudging permission was only accorded because at the period of the French invasion the troops entered the place and defiled it once and for all.

What the old saint, Sidi Okba, whose shrine the mosque is, would have to say about the matter if he were still alive is probably a very different story.

He rode from Biskra to Tangier with six hundred men, and made a conquest of the land in the name of the Prophet. So they put an inscription above his tomb: "May God have mercy on him."

It is only fitting that a town which could be guilty of so fine a jest should also be the setting for another little tale which, I think, has escaped some of the guide-books.

The *dramatis personæ* are Sidi Aissa and the Devil.

Whilst we are waiting in truly Oriental style for the mufti, just place the actors on the scene before you. Imagine this rider and donkey to the left to be the Devil with his wares. Suppose the gentleman striding along beside him, to set him on his way, is Sidi Aissa, with the other passers-by showing as little interest in the incongruous company as is usual in a sun-baked city of baked mud, dust, and camel-dung.

"Where are you off to, my friend, so heavily laden with wares ? " says Sidi Aissa ; to which the Devil replies :

" Sidi, these are the assorted perfidies and lies and conceits of the world, which I am going to market among the men of this earth."

" I wish you joy," said Sidi Aissa ; " I shall be anxious to hear the result ! "

Next day Sidi again meets the Devil in the same place going forth with his packs.

" What luck, my friend ? " says he.

" Poor, ah, very poor, good Sidi," replied the Devil. " 'Tis true I sold, but when I asked for payment——! The Sultans beat me ; the merchants took me before the cadi with lies upon their tongues ; and as for the Wise Men, when were they ever known to have any money ? " Sidi Aissa laughed.

" My heart rejoices within me, O Devil. But what do you propose now ? "

" Now I go to the women."

Next day the Sidi again met the Devil at the same place with his ass and packs. As he set him, neighbourlike, upon his way, he asked :

" Well, well, neighbour Devil, what news ? "

" The very best, Sidi ; clean sold out. And, indeed, they gave me money in advance for the purchase of these same wares, which I am going to apportion amongst them ! "

But it is time we held our tongues, for here comes the mufti under the arch.

As I said before, France, with an astuteness worthy of her best traditions, maintains these muftis in her pay, just as she does the mouderres, whose business it is to explain the chapters of the Holy Writ, with special reference to that on the Holy War, for the chapter on the Holy War is analysed with great care, that therein may be found a thousand and one reasons "pour ne pas mettre le sabre au clair!"

Our new mentor is a handsome Arab of about forty, as near as one can judge. As he shepherds us into the mosque, taking great care to leave the rabble outside, he explains that he was trained in the French schools and called to the Algerian Bar before he took the cloth. Conversation then, of course, waxes eloquent on general matters.

Unfortunately there is nothing about the mosque that calls for especial comment. We are shown the sepulchre of Sidi Okba, and make the usual felicitous remarks. We remark on the beautiful mimbar or pulpit, we climb the uncomfortable stairs to the minaret, and do our duty to the scenery, which consists chiefly of flat roofs and straggling palms. Finally we descend and present the mufti with a coin of the period.

"I thank you for your handsome present, messieurs," says he. "I must, of course, give the whole of this to the alms-box of the mosque. I am allowed to ask for nothing for myself!" When the second coin has changed hands, he looks upon us with that air of old-

THE GREAT WHITE COLONNADE

world wisdom that even the shoe-blacks have in perfection. "Ah!" he remarks, as one gentleman to another, "is that your guide outside?"

"No," we reply with perfect truth; "he took command at the moment of your arrival."

"I thought so! Now when you go, take my advice; donnez-lui dix sous et un coup de pied au derrière!"

To my mind this last remark explains in great part the conquest of Africa.

And so we bid him good-bye.

From the man who views with class favour the alien race, to the man who casts a perspicacious eye on the powers that be, is surely but a small step. Let me quote the remark of one Abd-er-Rahman, sheikh of Sidi Okba and eye of the Government, as it came to me. The sheikh has a very fine garden be it known.

"My house is open to my friends, the French. Mais les Anglais—jamais de la vie!"

Sidi Okba is a great centre for the activities of the religious fraternities, whose nets, however, spread north to Tangier and south to Lake Chad.

A 'chioukh' is the head of a religious brotherhood or 'khouan,' run much on the lines of a masonic fraternity. He is next in order above a khalifa.

Some of the brotherhoods, such as the Ramayana, which has its headquarters at Sidi Okba, are avowedly anti-foreign; others, like the Cheikhia and the Taibia, are not so.

It was thanks to the Tidjanian fraternity that

Duveyrier was able to penetrate the Sahara; one of the lower officers of the Order, a moqadem, even accompanying the column to Laghouat; whilst the moqadem who accompanied the ill-fated Colonel Flatters on his mission to the Touaregs stood by him in the fatal hour, and was cut down with the rest of them when the massacre took place. It is, consequently, not strange to find the French Government taking an interest in this last Order to the extent of rendering great honours to the Mosque of Si Ahmed Tidjani.

Experience has no doubt taught the French wisdom since the days when they nearly brought down the whole of North Africa about their ears, in the 'thirties and 'forties, by an ill-advised attempt to lay infidel hands on the funds and revenues of the great brotherhoods. These funds and revenues are raised by a wholly illegitimate taxation of the peasant through blood-sucking agents of the chioukh, namely, the chouach. A chouach, or agent, of this type comes next after a moqadem in order of importance. He taxes the poor wretches in the name of Allah and the Prophet, explaining or not, as the case may be, that whatever is paid to the roumi goes straight into the pockets of the Devil, and helps the payer not one step on his journey to Paradise; and that to make up leeway, a good fat obole must be paid to his lord and master, the chouach. Considering that there are some six thousand chouachs doing their rounds, it is not a

YOU PASS INNUMERABLE SHOPS

remarkable thing that between them they should raise seven million francs a year or so. Some small portion of this may possibly go to its original object, the support of the various 'atazouia' (native almshouses raised in honour of the many Oualis, or Saints), but, of course, the vastly greater part is diverted to the alimentation and greater blessing of those who really do count.

It is not only at home that charity-organising is a lucrative profession.

All this has been, I am afraid, a very sad digression, so let us come back to earth and the grateful shade of the mosque portico. Not a moment too soon as it turns out. Look at this great tent-like litter that sways gently with the camel's roll as the ungainly creature comes shuffling along. There ought at any rate to be some pretty eyes behind the gaudily-striped awning. Let us follow and see.

As you step out again into the burning heat under the cloudless steely-blue sky, you blink again. You press through the crowded street after the romantic camel. Now that you have more or less done your duty, you feel at liberty to take fuller stock of your surroundings.

After all, the soft brown of the houses is not unpleasant. Square outlines that catch the eye through the frame-setting of the street-end take on a cameo-like appearance that is delightful. Dust ceases to irritate, the odour of burning camel-dung begins to have a charm of its own. Door-lintels become pleasant breaks in the monotony of blank walls. You even feel sorely tempted to sit down under the shade of a friendly arch, there to partake of a cup of the blackest of black coffee from a neighbouring café, and listen to the chattering Arabs, or watch the wrinkled faces of two draught-players. There would be no need, you reflect, to break your legs in an attempt to squat tailor-wise, for a beneficent patron has provided good solid benches for the delight of his customers.

But the camel leads you on to the market-place, now rapidly emptying. Group after group of burnouses melts away. Galled mules are compelled to resume their weary loads with a resounding thwack and a "Hé ! hé !" Little clouds of dust arise as the trains get under way. Our camel joins a string of some thirty or forty others. Just for an instant it seems as if a corner of the awning is displaced and a pair of luminous black eyes gaze boldly into your own. As you feel yourself plunging into their unfathomable depths a dainty hand replaces the delinquent corner and the caravan moves slowly forward. Whither ?

But stay ! Before you turn dejectedly on your heel there is a ceremony to be performed. Enter this low doorway here and converse with the polished gentleman who runs the show. Drink a cup full of his delicious coffee, suck one of his priceless oranges, then wander calmly round his shop, appraising goods that please the eye. He follows smiling, proud in the dignity of a chocolate robe. Even the gold cord that binds soft folds of his turban takes an especial brilliance, as he recommends a long knife with a most romantic history. You welcome the advice of his low, pleasant, voice as his handsome face bends over the treasure. He offers yet another cup of coffee from the exquisite tray of beaten brass, and at the same time informs you that never before has he offered the article so cheap. You are undecided as to whether you ought not to offer him double the value of what he is asking as a reward for honesty, when something on the blade catches your eye; you look again. Alas! It is the rejection mark of a small-arms factory.

Gently you replace the gem in its place, you purchase some picture post-cards as a sop to Cerberus; then you salaam and walk slowly from the shop, your heart brimming over with sadness.

And that, perhaps, is why folks love the East.

EPILOGUE

AS I revelled in the cooling sluice of the primitive Roman baths at Biskra and watched the rippling muscles of the negro attendant as he went about his grateful task, a slight feeling of ennui crept over me. I think it must have been that visit to Sidi Okba that bred the germs of the poison.

As the day wore on, the lassitude and feeling of weary distress became more pronounced. I met a loafer, who looked upon my kindly face.

"Je demande un demi-franc," said he.

"Why ?" I asked.

"Pour me faire plaisir !" was his reply.

On finding that my pulse failed to take up the challenge, I knew that the game was up. I proceeded to the station and saw about a ticket. And now, good reader, supposing you have had the kindness to accompany me thus far, I can only thank you for your sweet courtesy, in the hopes that your long journey may from time to time have been relieved by some small spice of pleasure. Together we have seen at work the fine effort of a great and gallant nation to bind together, even as the colours of the spectrum combine to form a single colour—white. We have also seen in some small

DROP THE PILOT

measure how the autochthon himself regards the matter. We have further seen one of the most picturesque and grand countries that wind and rain have ever whittled from the elementary rocks. So now I think it is the time for you to—drop the pilot !

INDEX

A

Abd Allah ibn Said, 243–4
Abd-er-Rahman, Sidi, 32, 307
Agriculture in Algeria, 63 *et sq.*, 151, 166, 203 *et sq.*, 211; exotics, 45 *et sq.;* market gardens, 65–6, 71, 78–9, 82 *et sq.;* orchards and vineyards, 69 *et sq.;* irrigation, 74; fruit-growing, 84–5; farmyards, 93; shepherds, 93–4; olive-growing, 118 *et sq.;* fig-growing, 120; date-growing, 291–2
Ahmed, Bey of Constantine, 34
Aïn Roua, 187 *et sq.*
Aissouas, The, 25
Algiers: hotels in, 1 *et sq.;* first impressions of, 3; choosing a guide, 3, 4; a walk through the town, 5; dress in, 3, 5, 6, 13; the Kasbah, 7 *et sq.;* in old Algiers, 12 *et sq.;* shopping in, 14, 55 *et sq.;* ladies' quarter in, 14; a battle with the guide, 16 *et sq.;* a native interior, 16 *et sq.;* entertainment by Ouled Nails, 20 *et sq.;* mosques in, 22–3, 26 *et sq.*, 32 *et sq.;* dancing and music in, 23–4; religion in, 26 *et sq.;* lady wrestlers in, 31, 37 *et sq.;* a dinner at the Taverne Gruber, 34–5; education in, 41–2; industries in, 42, 69 *et sq.;* buildings in, 43–4; a visit to the Jardin d' Essai, 45 *et sq.;* French conquest of Algeria, 47 *et sq.;* the Jew in, 49 *et sq.;* plans for leaving, 52 *et sq.;* buying a bicycle in, 55–6, 62; adventure at a café in, 60 *et sq.;* trips in the vicinity of, 63 *et sq.*
Ali Siaf, 9
Ampère, 202 *et sq.*
Arabs, The, 6 *et sq.*, 30, 129, 130, 147, 200, 205, 210, 217 *et sq.*, 241, 260, 266 *et sq.*, 310
Aroudj, 9
Aurès, The, 266, 269, 274, 275
Azazga, 123–4

B

Bab-Azoun, Rue, 4, 5, 7, 40
Bab-el-Oued, Rue, 32
Bacon, Lord, 167
Bacri, Busnach & Co., 48 *et sq.*
Balearic Isles, 78
Bataillons d'Afrique, 238 *et sq.*
Batna, 57, 206, 213, 223 *et sq.*,

257–8, 265; football match at, 226 *et sq.*
Bedouins, The, 6
Beni-Paten, 99
Beni-Salah, 32
Benzarti, 3 *et sq.*, 10 *et sq.*, 77
Berbers, The, 92–3, 103–4, 121 *et sq.*, 138, 147, 243
Bernelle, 213 *et sq.*
Biskra, 2, 52, 54, 57, 188 *et sq.*, 206, 257, 265, 269 *et sq.*, 291 *et sq.*
Biskri, The, 2 *et sq.*
Bizerta, 196
Bougie, 82, 133, 142 *et sq.*, 183, 198
Byzantines, 243, 252

C

Camp du Maréchal, 90 *et sq.*
Canrobert, Maréchal, 129
Cardo Maximus (Timgad), 246 *et sq.*
Caxine, Cap, 68
Chabet-el-Akra, Gorges of, 177
Charles V, 7, 33
Chasseurs, The, 199, 206
Cheikhia, The, 307
Cheragas, 68, 71 *et sq.*
Col de Sfa, 272–3
Col de Telmet, 219
Commodus, Arch of, 235
Compagnies de discipline, 238 *et sq.*
Constantine, 231 *et sq.*, 255, 257
Corbuccia, Colonel, 245
Corneille, 212 *et sq.*
Corso, 87
Crémieux, Edict, 49 *et sq.*

D

Dancing (native), 23–4, 231, 279 *et sq.*, 296 *et sq.*
Decumanus Maximus (Timgad), 247 *et sq.*
Deval, 49
Djurdjura Gate, 101, 103, 109
Djurdjura range, 110, 114, 120, 132
Dress (Algerian natives), 3 *et sq.*, 20–1, 95, 120–1, 138, 217

E

El-Biar, 74–5
El-Kantara, 261 *et sq.*
El-Kebir, 27
El-Kseur, 137, 140 *et sq.*
El-Outaia, 270
Essai, Jardin d', 45 *et sq.*, 77

F

Flatters, Colonel, 308
Flavius Maximus, 245
Foreign Legion, 238 *et sq.*
Fort National, 95–6, 99 *et sq.*, 105, 117, 119, 120
Fromentin, Eugène, 45

G

Gallienus, 236
Gouvernement, Place du, 4, 25
Greeks, The, 244
Gregory, Patriarch, 244

Gruber, Taverne, 34–5, 60
Guyotville, 63 *et sq.*

H

Hezzabins, 31
Hodna range, 204, 212
Hotels and Inns (Algerian), 2, 34–5, 60, 66, 86, 88–9, 100, 112, 123, 125 *et sq.*, 131, 138 *et sq.*, 148, 152, 155, 158, 189 *et sq.*, 202, 216, 242–3, 257–8, 264, 275 *et sq.*, 301
Hussein Dey, 48–9

I

Ibn-al-Awam, 65, 120
Ibn Khaldoun, 171
Imams, 30
Ismail (Guide), 281 *et sq.*, 294 *et sq.*

J

Jardin de la Garnison (Biskra), 276
Jardin Publique (Biskra), 276, 283
Jugurtha, 235
Julius Maternus, 235
Juno, 253
Jupiter, 253
Justinian, 244

K

Kabyles, The, 6, 71, 92, 95–6, 106, 111, 113, 120–1, 129, 132, 135, 138, 165, 170 *et sq.*, 179, 192, 197 *et sq.*, 205, 210, 243, 266
Kabylia, 90, 94, 118 *et sq.*
Kair-ed-din, 11
Kasbah, The, 7 *et sq.*, 12, 32, 75
Kerrata, 161, 179, 183–4
Khouans, 29
Koran, The, 27
Kourloulis, Massacre of, 9

L

Lafeyrière, Mgr. (Abp. of Constantine), 245, 255
Laghouat, 269, 308
Lambœsis (or Lambèse), 235, 237, 242
Lavigerie, Cardinal, 193
Lecq and Brame, MM., 70
Lucius Verus, 250
Lyre, Rue de la, 8

M

Macmahon, Maréchal 258
Mahomet, 7, 23, 95, 111, 179
Mahonnese, The, 78
Main Street, 101, 113, 293
Maison Carrée, 78–9
Mancour, Sidi, 33 *et sq.*
Manœuvres, Champ de, 77
Mansouriah, 152 *et sq.*
Marabouts, 29 *et sq.*
Marcus Aurelius, 249
Marengo, Jardin de, 32
Marine, Rue de la, 25
Matifou, Cape, 10, 78
Mauretania, 225, 236
Maximian, 236
Medersa, The, 43, 166
Menerville, 86 *et sq.*, 130

Mersa, 150–1
Michelet, 110 *et sq.*
Minerva, 253
Mitidja, Plain of the, 69
Moors, The, 6, 15, 72, 208, 244
Morocco, 67, 144, 230
Mosques Djama-el-Djerid, 22 *et sq.;* Djama-Kebir, 4, 27 ; Sidi Okbar, 300 *et sq.*
Muezzins, 31
Mufti, 30
Mustapha-Supérieur, 1, 10, 43

N

Novara, Comte de, 11

O

Okba, Sidi, 244, 286, 292 *et sq.*, 300 *et sq.*
Orléans, Duc d', 25
Ostrich-hunting, 286 *et sq.*
Oued Agrioun, 161, 177
Oukils, 31
Ouled Nails, 10, 20–1, 280

P

Pélissier, Maréchal (Duc de Malakhoff), 129
Peñon, 2, 11

R

Ramadan, Ibrahim, 78
Ramayana, 32, 307
Randon, Marshal, 99
Ravin Bleu, 223
Reghaia, 87
Régis, Max, 49, 50
République, Square de la, 52
Rhamadan, 32
Roman remains, 235 *et sq.*, 242 *et sq.*, 312
Rouiba, 77, 85–6
Rovigo, Rue de, 75

S

Sahara, Foum es, 262
Sahara, The, 57, 161, 213, 235, 257, 262–3, 272 *et sq.;* Roman occupation of, 235 *et sq.*, 312
Sahel, The, 69, 71
St. Eugène, Cave of, 66
St. Joseph, Monastery of, 79
Savignac, Sieur Bélaguer de, 7
Sebaou, The, 90, 95, 117, 121
Septimius Severus, 235
Septimius Flaccus, 235
Sétif, 57, 183, 189, 190, 196 *et sq.*, 214, 224, 257
Shakespeare, 167, 170
Smith, Rev. Sidney, 12
Souk-el-Tenin, 161
Stauéli, 71–2

T

Tacitus, 236
Tagma, Col de, 131–2
Taibia, The, 307
Takdint, Col de, 131, 136
Tangier, 304
Taourirt Ighl, 131, 135, 137–8, 141
Thamagudi, 243–4, 249

Timgad, 224, 242 *et sq.*
Tizi-Ouzou, 89, 93–4, 99, 117, 133
Tolbas, 31
Trajan's Arch, 244, 255

V

Valée, Boulevard, 32
Valentinian, 236
Valerianus, 236
Vandals, The, 236, 243
Vegas, Martin de, 2
Vespasian, Arch of, 248, 250

Y

Yacouren, 124–5, 140

Z

Zouave Band, 25
Zouaves, 101 *et sq.*, 113 *et sq.*, 199

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